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TWICE A MONTH

Adventure

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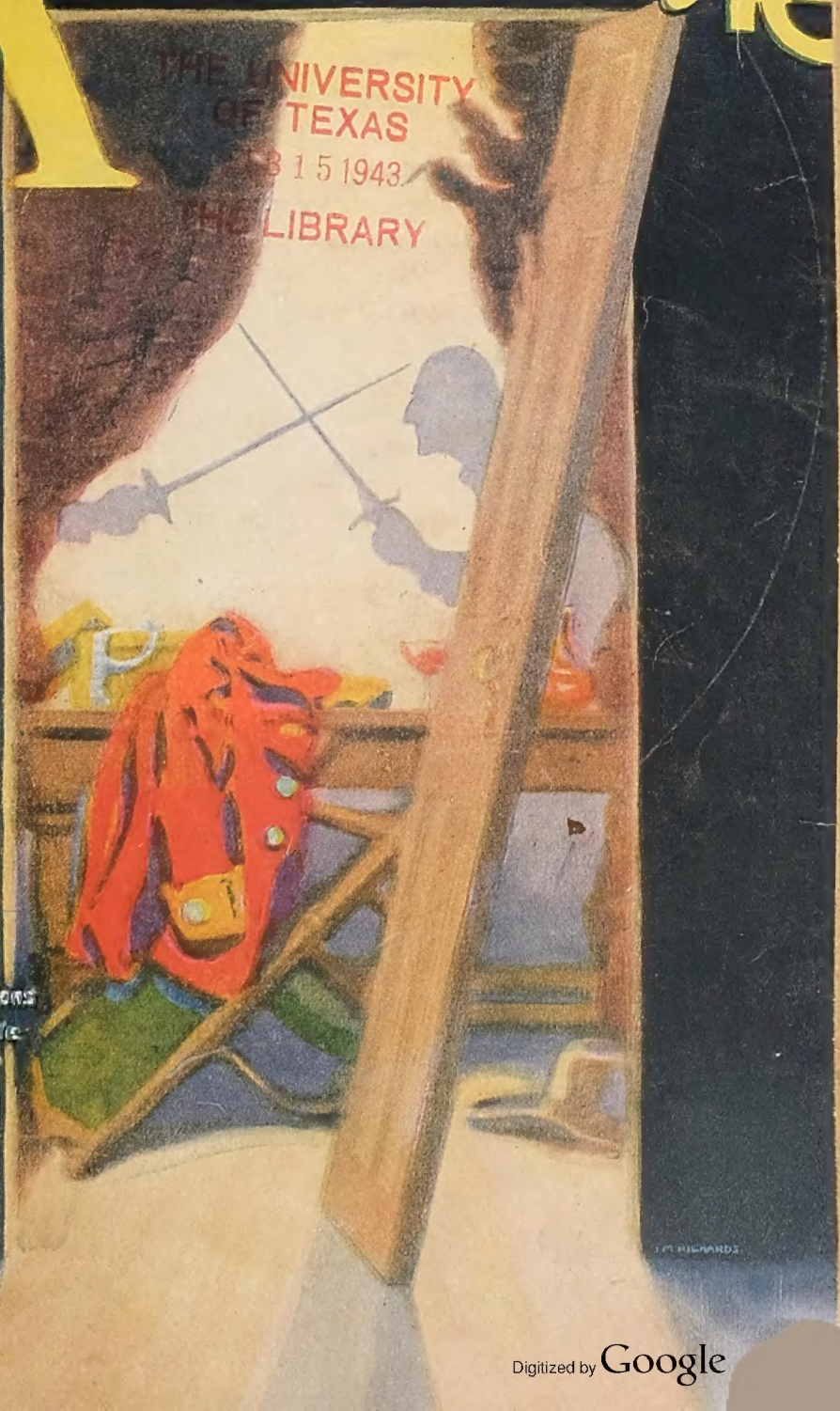

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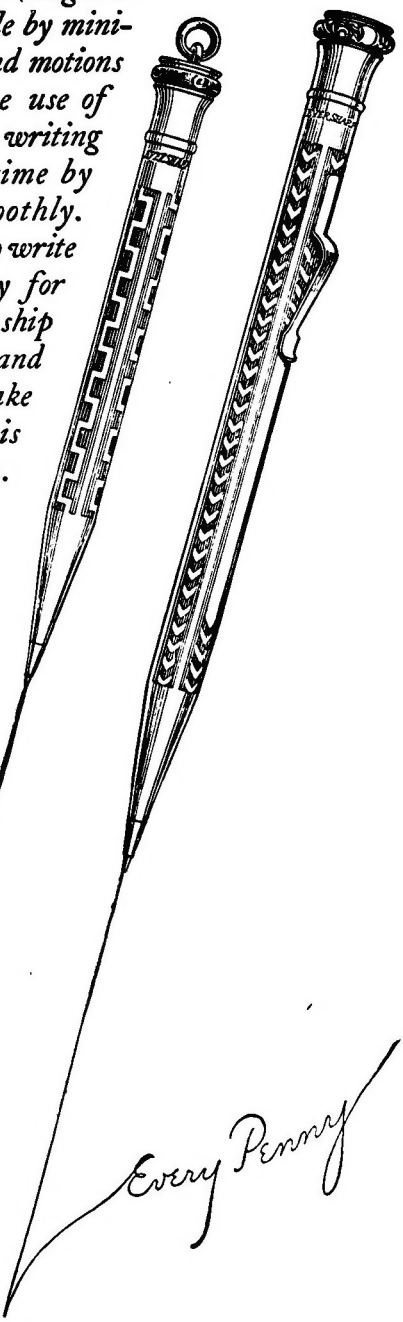

Every Penny

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BOUND MAY 1943 BL

This Letter Saved Me 36%

on a New Typewriter

Chicago, Nov. 2, 1920.

Dear Henry:

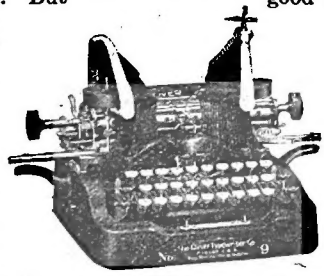
I hear that you are down in New York to open a branch office for your firm. You'll be buying a lot of things for the office, not the least important of which will be typewriters.

And that's what I want to talk to you about—typewriters. I want to give you the benefit of an experience I had some time ago, and thereby, I hope, save you some real money.

About a year ago I decided to buy a typewriter for home use. My first thought was to purchase one of the makes we were using in the office, which had been put in before I became buyer for the house. But when it came to digging up a hundred dollars for the machine—I just couldn't. Somehow or other it looked like too much money to me.

Was $100

Before the War



Now $64

Then I thought about picking up a second-hand machine, but the price was about as high, and I had no assurance of service.

I was undecided as to what to do, when one evening at home I ran across an Oliver Typewriter ad in a magazine. I remembered then having read the advertising before and being impressed with the story.

"Why pay $100 for Any Typewriter"—
"When You Can Buy a New Oliver for $64?"

read the ad—then it went on to explain how The Oliver Typewriter Company had cut the price by selling direct and eliminating costly selling methods. It was clear to me as an experienced buyer how they could well afford to lop off $36 of the $100 by their new economical selling plan.

The ad brought out the fact, too, that I didn't have to pay the $64 in a lump sum. I could settle at the easy rate of $4 a month. Naturally that appealed to me, for it was as easy as rental terms.

But the thing that decided me was their free trial offer. Without my sending or depositing a penny, they would ship me an Oliver for five days free trial. I could use the typewriter for five days just as if it were my own, and if I wasn't satisfied, all I had to do was to ship it back at the Oliver Company's expense. Well, I mailed in the coupon and got an Oliver for free trial. To make a short story shorter, I was more than pleased with the Oliver. I fully agreed with The Oliver Typewriter Company that if any typewriter was worth $100 it was this splendid Oliver.

Well, later when we found it necessary to replace some of the typewriters at the office, you may be sure I put in Olivers, saving the company a nice $36 on each. At first the girls were reluctant about changing machines, but after a week or two with the Oliver, they wouldn't have any other.

Naturally now we are all Oliver enthusiasts—that's why I write this letter to you.

You just give the Oliver a trial and you'll be more than willing to buy me a good dinner when I arrive in New York next month. Yours, J. B.

That is the letter that saved me $36 on each of my typewriters. I not only equipped the office with the Oliver, but, like my friend, I also bought one for home use. Yes, I am more than willing to buy my friend a good dinner for his valuable advice.

Any reader may order an Oliver direct from this ad by mailing the coupon. No money in advance. No deposit. No obligation to buy. Return or keep the Oliver as you decide after five days free trial. If you decide to keep the typewriter, you may take a year and a half to pay at the easy rate of $4 a month. Mail the coupon today—NOW.

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The OLIVER Typewriter Company

732 Oliver Typewriter Bldg.
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☐ Ship me a new Oliver Nine for five days free inspection. If I keep it, I will pay $64 at the rate of $4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for.

My shipping point is.....
This does not place me under any obligation to buy. If I choose to return the Oliver, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

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ADVENTURE
Feb. 18th, 1921

Published twice a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 28
Number 4

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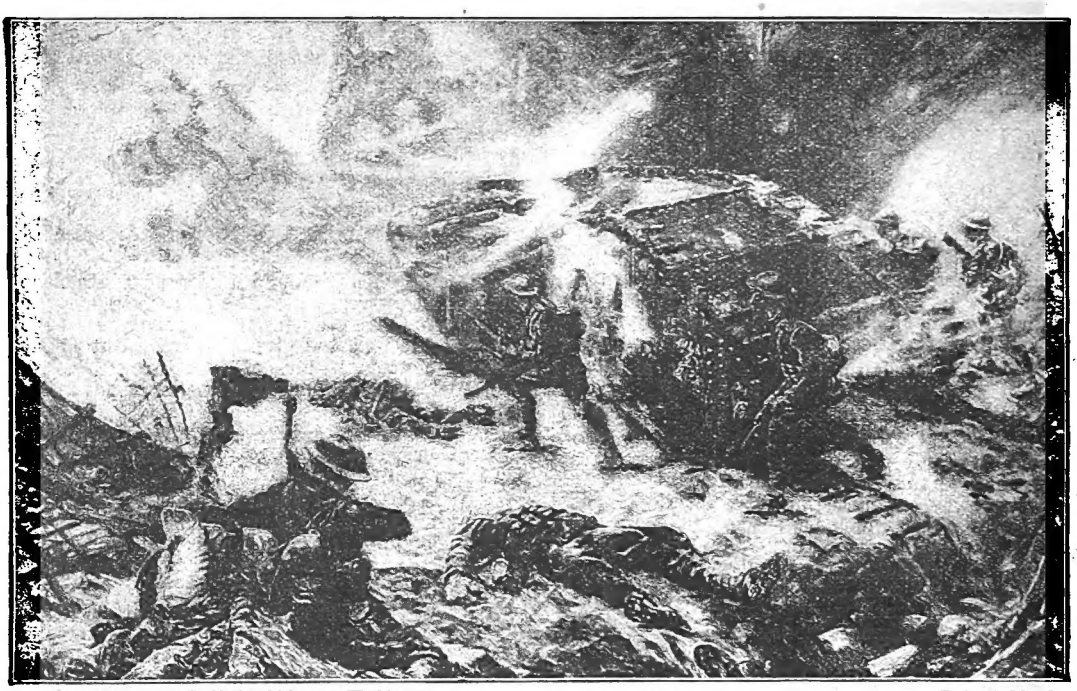

From the war pictures at the National Museum, Washington — By H. C. Murphy

Breaking the Hindenburg Line

All that four years of war had taught them—art, science, engineering, military resource—the Germans had put into that great defence system known as the Hindenburg Line. "Impregnable!" the Germans called it. "A line like to nothing that ever was in history."

Yet with all its strength, the Americans won through it—the 27th Division from New York and the 30th from Tennessee, North and South Carolina. No unit in Lee's Army of Northern Virginia ever fought with greater valor or more success than these sons of the new South and of the great city of the North. "A magnificent exploit," Gen. Rawlinson, Commander of the British Army of which they formed a part, called it. And magnificent it surely was, adding one more to the splendid traditions of the American Army in France.

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Was your "Boy" in that bitter fight? Was he one of the gallant lads that charged the Meuse heights? Or was he one of those who smashed through the Argonne forest to Sedan?

Wherever he was, you will want the record of his gallant fight, for yourself, for him, and for his children. You will want the whole history of the war. He will want the historic record of the great battles he was in. He will want to know about the fights that went on around him. You will want to know all that he has seen—all that he has heard. The whole truth, the whole splendid story, has never been published in any newspaper, magazine or book, but it is yours at last from the beginning, many years ago, to the victorious end. You can have it all in

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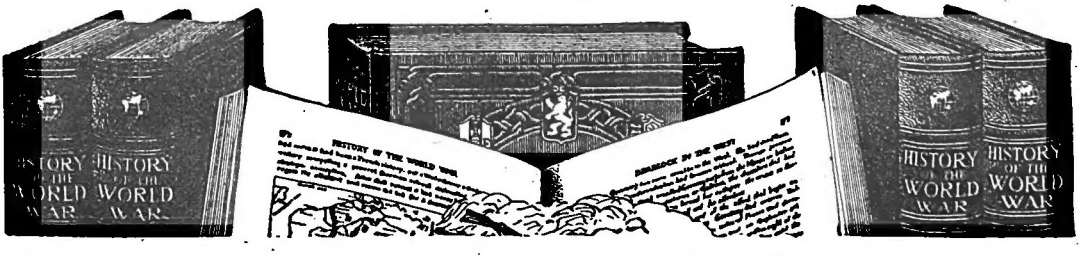

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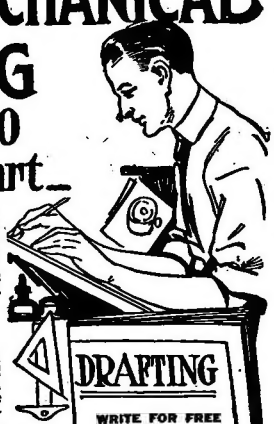

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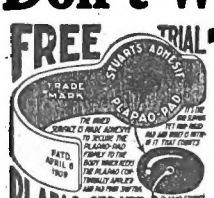

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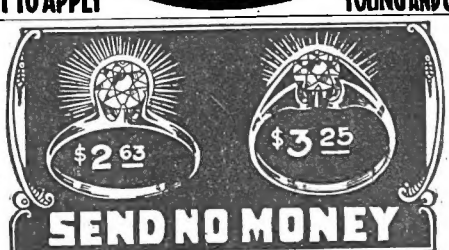

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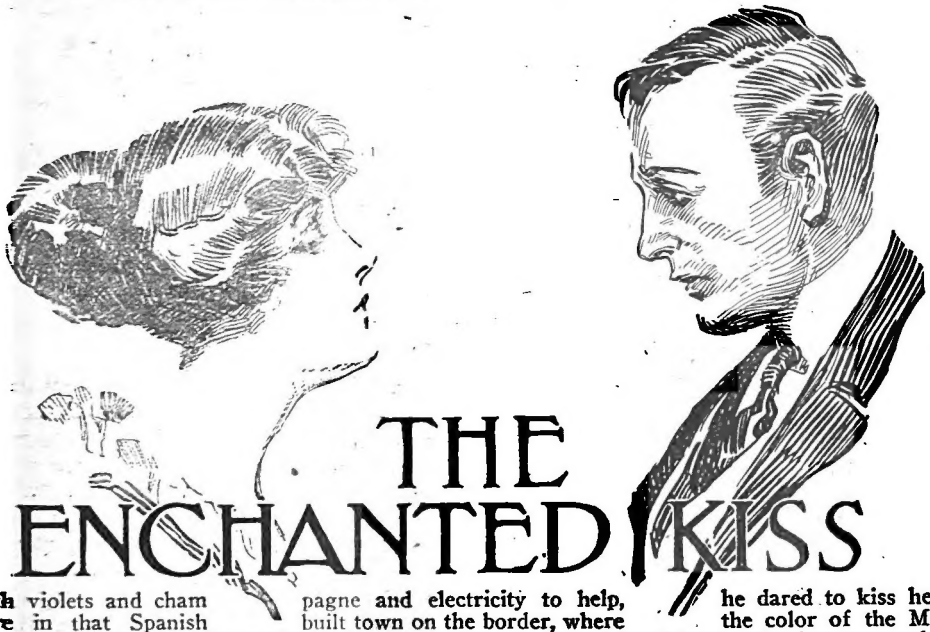

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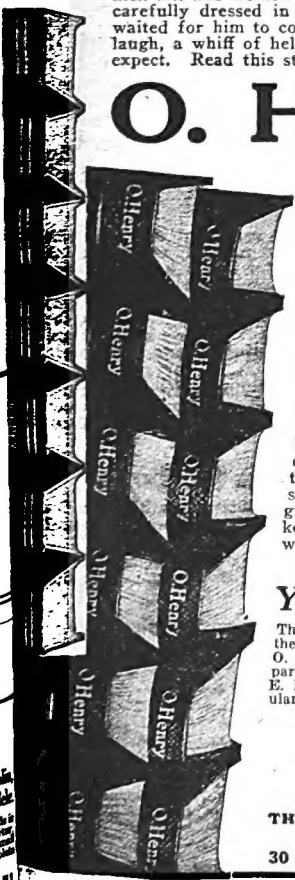

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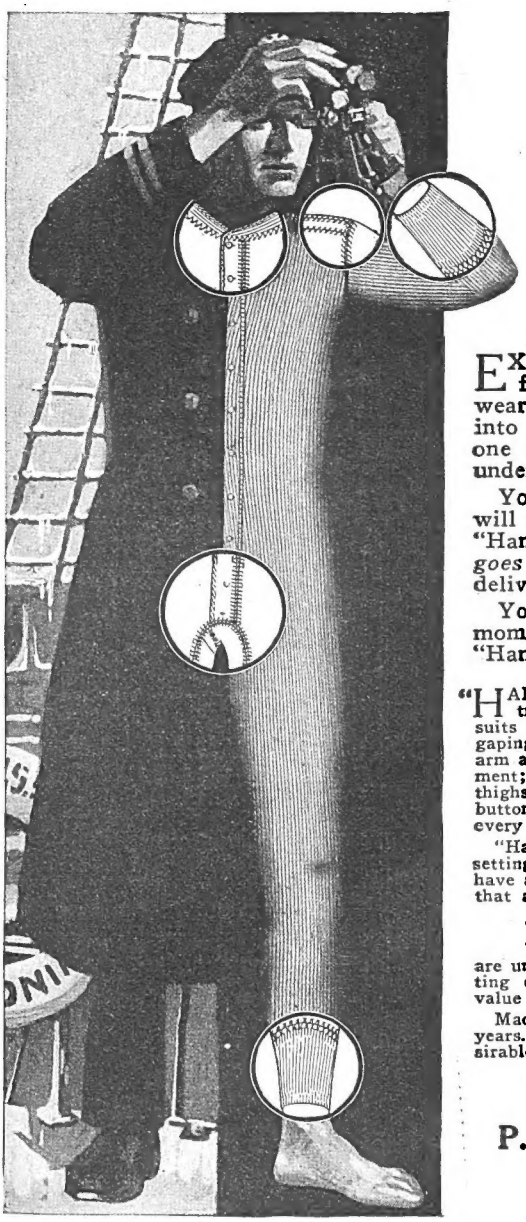

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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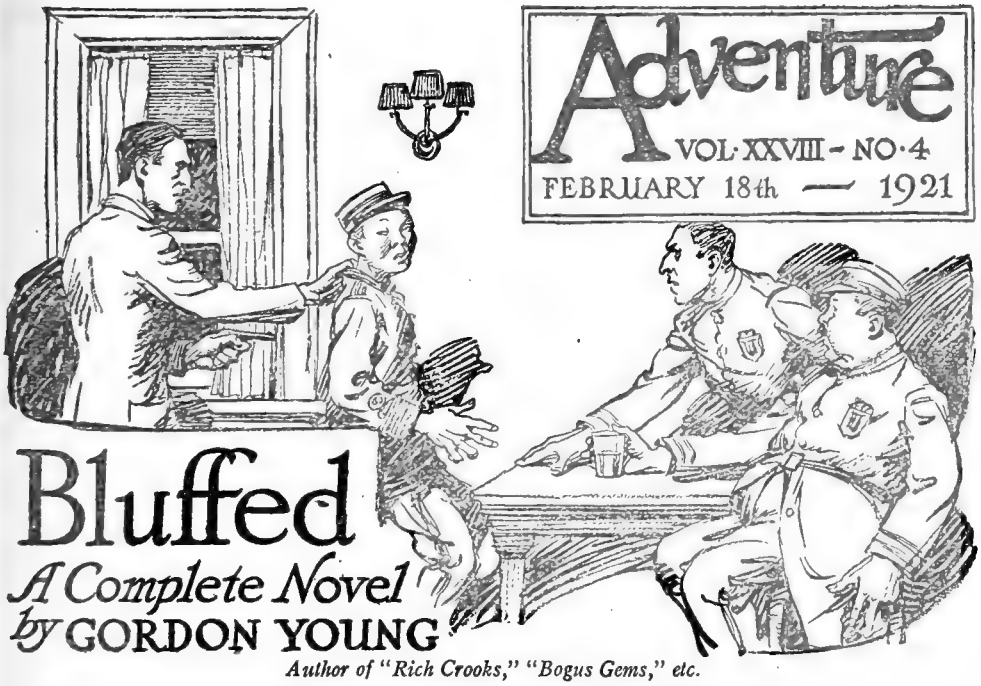

Bluffed

A Complete Novel

by GORDON YOUNG

Author of "Rich Crooks," "Bogus Gems," etc.

THE hall was full of policemen's feet. There was trampling and stamping on the heavy carpet as if everybody in the building had been aroused; and a knocking and thumping on my door. Voices, too, demanding that I open it. The voices seemed a trifle impatient.

It happened that any one of several things might be wanted of me, so I paused a moment or two in reflection.

When policemen come at 2 A.M. it is sometimes hard to guess just what they have found out. Then I was living in a sort of isolated and stately grandeur among a lot of expensive furniture—keeping a little under cover, or at least not advertising myself.

My conscience was clear enough. Certainly. But it is often difficult to get the police to take a fellow's conscience as evidence. Besides, I wasn't supposed to have any conscience—nothing but a lot of bluff and some luck.

Crack—slam—bang!

There was a clatter of fists on the door. The police always knock in our democratic country as if they came in the king's name.

I eyed my side of the door meditatively. I did not want to open it. For many reasons I did not want it opened, but among them was not the fear of being arrested. He is a poor citizen, one might say a disreputable fellow, who goes about getting himself in danger of being arrested; for if he hasn't the ability to be clever he should take the trouble to be good. I am a good moral man, and do not drink, use tobacco, or swear.

But naturally I hesitated to open the door when I knew that there was hardly a policeman in San Francisco who would not recognize me on sight; and it would be mentioned in the papers; then a lot of crooks, other than my friends, would see the item and say:

"Ah-ha! So that —— 's around here!"

There were one or two other reasons why I did not want to open the door; for though I had been in a sort of snug concealment, already trouble had found where I was stopping and came promptly to renew an old acquaintanceship.

And here were the police, too. I wondered just what and how much they had found out.

So I opened the door slightly and said—

"Well?"

"We're off'cers," a big fellow in uniform told me.

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"Open the door. We're fr'm headquarters," said a smaller fellow in plain clothes.

Both put the pressure of their hands against it. I let the door come open about six inches more and straightened up.

"Gee-criminy! You!" said the smaller man, staring at me.

"Richmond!" blurted the big policeman.

"Everhard, by the gods!" said a voice or two in the background.

"Well?" I repeated.

The hall was almost crowded; and this was on the fifth floor of an apartment house where one needed references for the privilege of paying from five to fifteen thousand a year for a place to sleep. Maybe the maximum figure is exaggerated a little, but the price of bedrooms was exorbitantly high, anyway.

Pajamas, bath-robes, touseled heads and eyes that had popped explosively open out of sound sleep were crowded behind the officers. All the nabobs, bobbed-haired ladies, fat matrons and skinny, vampish-looking wives in the place were interested in me. I do not like women—strange women least of all—and I do not like fat men in silk pajamas, nor the thin drooping kind of males that pretend to be rich Englishmen. The Saxon Arms was full of that sort.

There was renewed buzzing and craning of necks, jostling and pushing, as the name "Everhard" was half-shouted by the surprized policeman. The name Richmond didn't mean so much to my neighbors; but as Everhard, gambler and so-called gunman, I might have died and found a kind of monument in one of those wax models in a dime museum. Ghastly masks with painted cheeks and horse-tail mustaches lie in glass cases with a bit of biographical comment; a sort of Westminster Abbey for wife-murderers, horse-thieves and such. I would have been there if I had been killed in those days, for it was said that I had whittled away two or three revolvers in making commemorative notches.

I never cut a notch in my life, or wore a piece of jewelry, or posed for a picture—not even at the request of the police. But I was always being talked about by people who did not know me very well.

There in the hall, just then, were three policemen, a pair of detectives and one reporter.

Hands were pressing on the door, but my feet held it firmly. It was half-open, and I thought that enough.

I was polite and ready to be attentively patient, which was as much as police officers could reasonably expect that time of night.

But I always have been particular about who enters my apartments; and these were duplex apartments. A duplex apartment means double, two-fold, and refers chiefly to the rent.

"Now see here, Richmond. Stand aside," said the squat little man in plain clothes. He had bulldog jaws and keen eyes. "I'm 'Tective Sergeant Reynolds."

I knew that about as well as he did, but it is easier to deal with the police if you insist upon regarding them as total strangers and permit no familiarities.

He pressed closer and showed an inclination to shove.

But he did not shove. He paused and waited. I think he suspected that I do not like to be shoved.

I looked at those with him, behind him, then at him.

Again I said—

"Well?"

It was getting monotonous, having to ask so many times what was wanted.

The crowd was growing. Tenants from the floor below and the more expensive floor above were appearing.

"Say the word, sarge," the big policeman said, and braced himself as if to throw his weight against the door.

I caught his eyes and he shuffled his feet back an inch or two.

"Now, see here," Reynolds shouted. "Open that door. You've got a woman in there—an' we want 'er!"

THERE was gasping and squeaking among the spectators. They pressed more closely, edging right to the police elbows, trying, I suppose, to catch a glimpse of the woman. And some good folk think human nature has changed since Roman matrons went to see cruel things done to virgins and barbarians in the Colosseum.

I took my time about it, for I refuse to be hurried, and made the only reply that a man in my position could make. I said quietly—

"There is no woman in my apartment."

I think some of those who heard almost believed me for a few faces looked disappointed.

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"None o' that bunk goes!" said the big policeman savagely.

A slender young fellow in a long light overcoat threw out—

"Don't let him fool you, sarge."

Sergeant Reynolds stared at me angrily.

In my various little experiences with the police I have found it annoys them to have any one appear composed in their presence. But in my business, profession, or whatever a gambler's way of making a living should be called, hysteria would not be more ruinous than even the flicker of a muscle at the wrong time. Besides, I am not of an excitable nature.

"Richmond—" the sergeant was being firm—"Richmond, don't give us that talk. We know she's here."

The man in the long overcoat spoke again:

"I followed her. Been right here ever since. She's there. I listened an' heard your voices—you talked with 'er!"

He was a slender young fellow, quite young, in a flappy felt hat. His was an alert nervous manner, with a rather pale face and a cigaret between his fingers. I looked at him with interest.

He explained:

"I'm p'lice reporter. *'Zaminer*. Got a tip she might be over on Kearney—at an address. Layin' for her. Followed 'er. I came right in after her. She didn't take the elevator—she's there."

I shook my head slightly.

"You're a liar!" said the reporter quickly, casually, without anger.

Reynolds wheeled on him with—

"Cut that talk!"

I was not certain, of course, but I was under the impression that Reynolds believed that I had cut one or two of those mythic notches for milder insults.

"If you stayed on watch, how were the police called? And could you swear it was through *this* door she came? Look along the hall—the doors are alike."

He laughed easily, contemptuously. Evidently I did not know reporters and their resourcefulness. He said:

"This is the one I listened at, anyhow, an' heard 'er voice. Banged on one down the hall—told 'em what was up. Had 'em telephone. I stayed on watch. She's in there."

That would explain how the hall came to be crowded with my neighbors; he must have aroused that end of the hall.

"Gentlemen," I said without irritation and without pleading, "there is no woman in my apartments. I am sorry that you have troubled yourself."

I made as if to close the door.

There was an outcry and buzz and bustle; voices were indignant. Several feet and hands reached to hold the door open. I was told emphatically that it wouldn't do.

"Break in!"

"Kick 'im out o' the way!"

"What you waitin' for?"

"Arrest 'im!"

"Soak 'im!"

Those were a few of the comments. Some of the ladies squeaked and put their fingers toward their ears lest they should hear guns go off. Some people do appear to think that I shoot every time I'm spoken to unpleasantly.

"Look here," said Reynolds; "we're goin' break in if——"

"You have a warrant?"

"No—but——"

"This isn't a lodging-house, sergeant. This is a duplex apartment. The furniture is very expensive and——"

"Swat 'im, sarge! Spoil that sense o' humor."

That advice came from my reportorial visitor.

Reynolds took a grip on his patience and explained grimly:

"That woman's wanted for murder. She's guilty. She's here. We're goin' get her!"

I was pleasant about it. I smiled a little and shook my head; and I told him that I was sorry, because it was right that all murderesses should be caught; but that he wasn't going to catch her in my apartment—at least until she got into it.

For some reason or other, though it was a cool San Francisco morning about 2 A.M., the sergeant and the policemen were perspiring noticeably.

"Now listen, Richmond," the sergeant began again.

"Mr. Richmond, if you please," I suggested.

Somebody snorted and somebody swore; other people gaped.

Sergeant Reynolds looked the wish to bite me; the big policeman glared. If my neck had been between his fingers he might have lost self-control; as it was, he kept his self-control quite well.

But I do not like to be treated familiarly,

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particularly by comparative strangers, such as the police. One should always stand on formality with them; otherwise they take advantage.

"Well, Miss-ss-ster Richmond," he snarled, "listen to me——"

"Certainly."

I injected the soft answer that turneth away wrath—in theory; but it did not work. The mild interruption seemed to make him the more angry.

"I said listen to me! We're goin' search them rooms an' search 'em now! Get me? Get out o' the way."

Of course, he was talking partly to the audience behind him.

Briefly and coldly I reminded him that the police had no right to force entrance without a warrant; and that good hard-headed American juries were inclined to favor the man who used violence to resist an illegal entrance into his home—particularly if the man had money enough to hire good lawyers.

Being in the Saxon Arms presupposed a lot of money in the bank.

The reporter threw in a few words:

"I've seen some good ones. You're the best."

To Reynolds he said:

"The woman's there. I'll plead guilty to killin' old Pollard myself if she ain't!"

Somebody suggested that a watch be kept on the apartment until a warrant was secured, for the woman couldn't possibly get out.

"You won't let us in?" Reynolds demanded, like a man prepared to give an ultimatum.

"Why, I never said I would not let you in. I said you had no right to force an entrance. Also I said there was no woman in my apartment. You will find none."

With that, I stepped back, drew the door wide, bowed slightly and gave them an invitational gesture.

II

THEY came with a rush, six of them.

One of the policemen stood at the door, like a sentinel, to keep my curious fellow dwellers in the Saxon Arms from entering. They crowded about him, peering eagerly; some of them shivered with excitement and were keyed to tenseness in the hope of seeing a poor unlucky girl dragged to light.

The four officers went scurrying about with a kind of competitive eagerness as if playing hide-the-thimble; and they poked their noses into curtains, under beds, around furniture.

The *Examiner* reporter came straight for me. He had a nervous, direct, watchful way that was, somehow, impersonal. He was impudent, a little rash and frankly indifferent to what I might think of him—a thing about him that I liked very well. Being thin-featured, the appearance of alertness was increased; the features were clean and sharp, the face just losing its youthfulness and marked with the lines and weary shadows that appear when men drive themselves at nervous work. There was no doubt that if required to chose between food and tobacco he would have gone hungry.

He thrust out a card at me. I did not take my hands from the dressing-gown, but leaned slightly and read his name. It was Harold Jance.

Jance, seeing that I was deliberately cool, almost snobbish in attitude, tossed the card indifferently to the floor. He did it well and without a trace of being disturbed. He had enough impudence to have been not merely a reporter, but the editor.

"You're good, Richmond—Mr. Richmond. You're just as good as they say you are. I'm a stranger—but I know of you. Heard—you know. Lots. They say you're the devil himself at bluffin'. I'll agree. But your stall hasn't got you a thing, Mr. Richmond—not a thing."

I lifted inquiring eyebrows.

He laughed as one may who holds the better hand.

"You bluffed to give her time to beat it down the tradesman entrance. An' pulled a boner. Guess the two cops down there 've got 'er by this time. I warned 'em to be sure an' watch the back way—first!"

"Really?"

"Re-al-ly. Sure. Y'see, some stray bird telephones the office that he's seen a fluzzy drift into a house over on Kearney that has the look of the Pollard murder girl. Kind-hearted people are al'ys givin' a newspaper false tips, but I drifted over there to see an' was hangin' around. Sure enough, after the witchin' hour of midnight, out comes a lady all alone. She looks north, south—you know, all around like a sneak-thief pullin'

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something in a play. I let a shadow absorb me an' watched. She hikes down the street, an' little me comes along.

"Then I closed in an' took a chance. Said 'How-d'-do?' She jumped.

" 'Want me to call a policeman?' she says with a society air. She's no burglar's daughter—that girl.

" 'Surest thing,' I tells her. 'That's just what I do want! Let me do it f'r you.'

" 'Sir!' You know how they can say it—with all the feeling that a barroom bouncer puts into a kick as you go through the door.

"I got a touch of chill in my feet. Maybe she's not the girl, I whispers to myself—though I knew she was.

" 'I've made a mistake,' I says, an' pretends to duck.

"But I followed. Wanted to see where she went. One minute I was for grabbin' and holdin' on, and the next I thought it would be a fool play. It would've been, too— if she hadn't been the girl.

"All the way I was prayin' an' lookin' for a cop. These Frisco cops are sound sleepers—an' they don't walk in their sleep, either. They stay right up against the soft spot o' the darkest brick wall.

"Well, I came right along after her—into this joint. I got an ear right down there twixt door an' floor—an' knew I'd been a boob not to stop her. Lord, think of it. *''Examiner* captures Pollard murderess!' Seven columns of fame gone bluey. But it's all right—the same headline'll do anyway.

"So spill the beans to me, Mr. Richmond. The jig's up. Why'd she croak him? How do you come in on this? Make your statement an' I'll run it just as you say. You're too good a gambler not to know the winnin' hand when you see it. I've got it. The showdown's come. Let me have the dope."

"Dope? My, my," I said sadly, looking at him intently, "and such an intelligent-looking boy, too. You ought to take a little less each day, and eat fruit. They say the fruit diet——"

"Fruit! Say, what're you talkin' about?"

"*Tut-st-st-st.* Think what your parents would say!"

"One of us is goin' bugs! Parents! Fruit! ——."

He eyed me doubtfully, for I had a sincere, earnest expression and had spoken with feeling.

In the mean time the police had lost their optimism and were searching desperately. The two who had guarded the rear entrance reported that their hands were empty. The woman could not be found; no trace of her could be found. The searchers were poking and prying everywhere.

"Did somebody lose a dime?" I asked of Reynolds as he came up to me.

"Dime? Why?"

"I noticed one of your officers looking under the edge of a rug and——"

Jance chuckled. The sergeant was not amused.

"Somebody," he said, staring at Jance, "has put something over on us. Say, are you sure it *was* this apartment?"

"Sure? —— it! She's here!" Jance cried.

"Sergeant, haven't you—" I jerked my head in a confidential way, telling the detective to make a close scrutiny of Jance.

Jance cut in to ask what was the joke.

I ignored him; and as the sergeant regarded me inquiringly, I went on:

"You've seen enough of them. The pallor—the way he twitches. Look at his fingers and the whites of his eyes. There's only one way to cure the dope habit—the fruit diet will——"

"Dope!" Jance shouted. "Say, you're——"

"You know how it is, sergeant. They always deny it. And they imagine things. For instance, he tells me he knew where the girl was staying over on Kearney Street. Why didn't he call the police then? He says he had a talk with her tonight on the street—says the policemen were all asleep or he would have had her arrested then. Just look at him, and you don't wonder. He's in a bad way."

"Say, you—dope! Me!"

Reynolds was regarding him with sullen scrutiny. There simply had to be some explanation forthcoming. There was no sign or trace of the girl. The search was thorough. They had even looked into my trunks. A cockroach could not have escaped; but there was no young woman—at least in sight.

Reynolds, being convinced that the girl was not there, was almost convinced that she had not been there. The explanation would be simple if Jance was a dope.

If you accuse a man of using the stuff and get suspicion stirred up over his nervousness, only a medical man—and sometimes not he without an examination—can clear him.

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JANCE was a nervous fellow with a pallor, and sucked continually on cigarets. It was easy for the peevish, disappointed detective to imagine that the reporter had been against the dope.

He looked at Jance, who was regarding me with frank puzzlement. There are few things that a man resents more than being called a "dope." He knew that I didn't believe it of him. He knew that I was discrediting his story. He knew that if I were so innocent as I appeared I would not need to discredit his story. In fact, he was a very knowing young man; and blurted out—

"Say, Sarg, you don't believe this crook, do you?"

"No names there—no names," Reynolds said quickly.

"But he calls me a dope, hop-head, coke—I don't know what. Think I take that? Not from any man!"

He faced me defiantly.

"You know how it is, sergeant. They all deny it. But they can't hide the marks on their faces and their hands—look at his!"

Instinctively, as almost any man would have done, Jance jerked his hands away.

I laughed a little, easily. The sergeant regarded him with a stereotyped sneer; and Jance, seeing the turn of things, angrily thrust out his arms, saying:

"Here—here, look at 'em. Take a good look. Both of you. Look!"

Reynolds waved them away contemptuously. He was convinced. There is no pliability or subtlety in police psychology; they think an involuntary movement to conceal something means a confession of guilt, and there is nothing that can displace a confession—not even when it has been dragged out by hot pincers, or whatever it is they use in the third degree.

The big policeman came up. He said:

"Sarge, there ain't a long hair or lace ruffle in this joint. Somebody's bulled us."

"Well, she couldn't have left—" Jance began.

"No, she couldn't have left," I agreed.

"Sarge, she's here, I tell you," Jance cried.

"Go find 'er then," said Reynolds angrily.

Jance glared at me as he turned away; then he bolted as if he had caught sight of a small foot sticking from beneath one of the curtains. The officers were surprized. They followed him as if following a clue. The search began once more in earnest. They looked high and low, up and down. I caught Reynolds even moving an oil painting on the wall. There may have been some hidden panels and such things in the rooms; but if so I never knew of them.

I had told them there was no woman in the apartment; and I am perhaps a little too scrupulous with the truth. I have lied, emphatically and to the point; but not often. I had been truthful when I said that there was no woman in my apartment; and I might have added with equal honesty that none had left my apartment. And if really cornered, pressed, required to answer, I would have said with equal composure that no woman had been in my apartment; but that would not have been truthful—not at all.

The people in the hall were restive. They were ladies and gentlemen—children were not permitted in the Saxon Arms—in all sorts of nightwear.

The men, some of them, spoke in choppy accents like Yankees that have been to Oxford, or like other Yankees who imitate the ones that have been there. Others of my fellow cliff-dwellers had the open-voiced assurance of rich brokers, coupon-clippers, fellows that had a gift for making money as others have for picking pockets elsewhere than on the stock exchange. And all were utter strangers. I had a queer friend who shared the apartment with me when he was not engaged nights making a livelihood in his mysterious way. Once he said—

"Our neighbor across the hall is dead."

I asked how on earth he knew that.

"Read it in the paper," he answered—and, I believe, truthfully.

It was where he got many of his jokes.

Anyway, there they were, agitated as a swarm of drones; all eager and hopeful to see some poor girl jerked into view; every last one of them waiting morbidly to have a look at her humiliation.

As I had assured the landlady—called a superintendent—many times, I was in bad company up there in the Saxon Arms. Among the cribs and joints and barrooms one found more violence, but also more sympathy. She knew it. Madame Guigane was a woman of two worlds; at home in either.

I did not care to stand there like a fish on a string, so I stepped to the door, gently moved the policeman to one side, and asked politely—very politely indeed—if any of the sightseers cared to join in the search.

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If so, I said, still being polite, I would lock up the money and trinkets lying about and admit whoever cared to come. Women, of course, entered at the risk of being mistaken for the murderess.

There was much sniffing and up-turning of noses; much giving of glassy stares, much sharp, half-muffled, spiteful comment; with a man's voice here and there mumbling what he would do to me if he had me alone.

"Let's just show him!" somebody said, and three or four unrestrainable sightseers, women, did come—pulling at a man's sleeve and bringing him too.

Their presence caused a little excitement among the officers. The policeman at the door was called down. I explained. The excitment grew. Sergeant Reynolds was almost agitated. He said the search was over. There was no woman; and where was that blasted '*Zaminer* fellow?

Evidently in the commotion he had departed before the sergeant could catch him alone. No one remembered seeing him go; but he was gone.

"I'll fix him," said Sergeant Reynolds. "The dope!"

So it was that I received an almost public exoneration and apology.

It was very disappointing for my neighbors. The squad of cops tramped off heavily down the carpeted hall. I waited at the door, as a considerate host should, until they were well on their way; then I closed the door and locked it carefully.

III

MY ROOMS looked as if burglars rather than policemen had been through them. Both have a disordering touch and are seldom welcome; but socially I prefer the burglars. And I speak from experience—lots of it.

Having closed the door, I waited, listening, to hear if anybody came slipping back. My ears are sensitive—like my finger-tips.

There seems to be something deliberate, something more than chance, in the fact that my troubles always begin shortly after midnight. Every bad mess I have been into had midnight for the signal hour. And of course it always has to do with a woman, which is about the way that everybody else's troubles stack up.

I must say that I like women all right—in their place. But I am not one of those men that cheer and beat their hands together when the fellow that wants you to vote for him mentions his mother. I was driven out of the fiction market because so many books were written on the theory that getting married to some particular woman was the most important thing in a man's life. I read a little history for entertainment at times. Henry VIII was something of a favorite at the time. He knew how to put women in their place.

And there I was, an innocent and inoffensive citizen, implicated in the murder of a rich old duffer who should have been hanged by the State long ago. The State had been saved its hangman's fee. And I, who had just then a sufficiency of troubles of my own, was suddenly jerked into that mess all because of a young woman who was as much a stranger to me as the Queen of Spain would have been had she got me out of bed and cried:

"I am followed. Hide me quick!"

Since the young lady was unusually pretty I suppose King Henry would have offered marriage; but I hung her out of the window and let her dangle five stories up in the dark cool morning.

It happened that the man who shared, or rather who had required me to share, the duplex apartments, was a fellow of strange and mysterious habits; and for purposes of his own he had inserted a bar of iron just below a window ledge which overlooked an alley. He had also a small but strong rope at hand night and day and was ready to slip the rope on the bar and go sliding down while the police were looking into and under the bed.

I knew his business very well and I had known him for many years. He was rather secretive, as successful men must be; audacious as a hawk, generous, unearthly clever. At various times we had had a common interest in certain affairs, and the result was a comfortable feeling in each other's company; and we knew each other so well that there was no need to be confidential. Look out for the fellow who keeps explaining to you, telling all about himself, giving up his secrets. If he doesn't sell yours he will assuredly squeal at the first pinch in the hope of getting off light.

It might have been embarrassing to me had the police come looking for him; but I was sure that if they ever caught him it would be after he had a stroke of paralysis.

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He was nimble from his toes up, given to sudden absences and abrupt returns. He had more vitality and humor than was good for the social order; and he was gifted with pen or pencil, could draw anything, mimic anybody. Rawlison was a gifted fellow and had more joy out of life than most people who spend it dodging between the clutching fingers of policemen.

Madame Guigane knew him as well as I—even better. She approved of him; and she knew crooks, from bankers down. She was a hard-fisted, tender-hearted character with more queer kinks in her nature than a corkscrew puzzle; and she was much more familiar with the evil there is in the world than any one would have supposed from her appearance.

She did not look youthful, but well preserved. Her tongue was often like a Sicilian dagger; she was usually heartless toward any one—man or woman—who got into her claws, and she spent much of her money on the care of orphan waifs and strays who had never seen her. I never knew a more embittered woman, or one who played her game so cruelly.

But after the police left I did not stand meditating on Hazel Guigane and Jack Rawlison.

There was a strange young woman dangling a hundred feet in air just outside my window, and she was probably anxious to have somebody come near. I doubt if she had much faith in the cord that held her. It was scarcely half so thick as her little finger, but being woven of linen and steel wire, was strong enough to have hoisted an elephant. Rawlison kept a pair of padded gloves at hand to use in case he had to make a slide for it; and I had fastened a cushion in the loop for her to sit on, but at that there was not much comfort to be had out of the position.

She had come to me a total stranger; but even had it been necessary to hurt somebody, I am afraid that I would have had to go the limit to keep policemen's hands off her. She was the daughter of a man to whom I could deny nothing; and like many of my friends, he was a crook.

The code I have tried to live by has been a simple one; and I have made but few friends, for in that shady borderland between the upper and the under world and in a life of semi-outlawry, friendships are as exacting as in a blood-brotherhood. Crooks put a mark on the false one and whistle for Death. But it isn't the fear of death that makes men stand fast, for the coward tells it all when the police coddle him with promises. The only Pythian friendships that remain in the world are among the soldiers of fortune, adventurers and outcasts—the brotherhood of the damned. Probably the only place in the world today where a man's sheer character is accurately appraised and respected for itself alone is among his fellow convicts.

Understand that I am not defending or extolling crooks and convicts. Not at all. Most of them are bad as they are painted, perhaps worse; but at that they are not much different from other people, and the man who wants a friend that will stick to him when his money is gone, his health is shaken, when all hands are lifted against him and the evidence is damning, must either be married to the right woman or have broken bread with a crook.

And there are as many kinds of dirty verminous rascals in crookdom, who can't be trusted farther than a hand will reach to their throat, as there are in the up-town quarter. So among crooks friends are selected with great care for they mean life and death, not merely dinner parties and golfing foursomes; and the code is primitive as a feudal oath. When a friend signals for help you don't consult your attorney to see whether or not you will be liable to arrest, nor do you question the friend as to the right or wrong of his case—and once when I staggered with empty guns in my hands and collapsed at Tom Hartigan's feet, he asked no questions of anybody, but crouched *before* me and started shooting.

AND now, years later, ill luck had caught him by the heels and some powerful people wished him ten fathoms deep in hell-fire; so they had put him in the nearest thing like it that they had at hand—San Quentin, for twenty years.

He was jobbed and doubled-crossed; but he took the gaff with his mouth closed. He wouldn't squeal. He wouldn't even try to squeal.

Hartigan had been a gambler and a good one when I was a youngster; then he became a Barbary Coast saloon-keeper, but gradually got corrupted by politics and was implicated in the opium ring.

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When the shakedown came and the public demanded that grafters be cleaned out, punished, taught to respect civic purity and so forth, Hartigan was thrown to the wolves. "Twenty years," said the judge, who had often had his hand behind his back so Hartigan could slip something into it.

He was guilty as charged, and more. There wasn't an innocent thing about him except his confidence in his fellow grafters. His trial and sentence was supposed to be a play to fool the public. The "boys," they said, would have Hartigan out in no time. They would make it up to him. He was to keep his mouth shut and have faith in their influence with the governor.

He told me all about it while his trial was going on.

And I told him that I wouldn't mind trusting a few ocean-going sharks and a couple of hungry tigers if they promised to watch over me while I was asleep; but that I wouldn't believe any two-legged animal enough to go to San Quentin.

He laughed, but not merrily. He said:

"I'll tell you, Don. I've played the game from all angles. I've made money. I'm not complaining. No. But if I had it all to do over again I'd never get mixed up in anything where you had to share a secret with a crook that wears a long-tailed coat."

Hartigan took the jolt to save the crowd, of whom the judge that sentenced him was one. He fought the case with all the technical turns and twists that expensive lawyers can put into a trial; and at last on a compromise he took his sentence to keep from involving his "friends."

Figuratively they cut a man's fingers off as he goes through the gates of San Quentin, and put a gag in his mouth. Hartigan could have jolted respectable citizens by the pewsful before he submitted to being a scapegoat; but after he went "over the bubble"—as some of my friends who have made the trip express it—he was a mere animal. He had no sooner passed the scrofulous patch of earth studded with white boards above the bare yellowish little mounds that stood symbolically at the prison entrance, than he became a number—and nothing more.

His "friends" on the outside forgot him, as if he were buried instead of entombed. He went in to protect a lot of crooks that wore long-tailed coats to public dinners; and they didn't want him out. He knew too much.

I do not know, for I have never been intimately associated with a prison, how they worked it to keep him gagged. Perhaps the guards were bribed to have him continually reported for misconduct so that he lost his privileges of writing and seeing visitors. Anyway he was permitted no communication. Perhaps people higher up were influenced to keep the gag tightened. I don't know how it was worked.

Hartigan had turned over power of attorney to his lawyer; and the lawyer, being one of the best on the Coast, knew how to swindle his client with thorough legality. Hartigan was stripped to the bone—and there wasn't a chance for him to make a complaint—not for twenty years, anyway. His "friends" did have influence with the governor, who, like most of the other people in the State, thought them respectable men of affairs; so they double-crossed Hartigan and left him to rot.

The only way he could get a message out was by some discharged convict; and as each of these messengers was usually loaded with requests from fellow prisoners, this courier service was not very dependable.

Over and over Hartigan sent out word to his crowd that he wanted some signs of sympathy; but all the reply that he got was silence. As far as they were concerned, he was buried. Being respectable citizens, a judge or two, a banker or so, a capitalistic lawyer and a hatful of local statesmen with some police heads, they could not stoop to hold conversation with a convict or show sympathy. All that they seem to have done was to keep the newspapers commenting on Hartigan and telling the public how much it was to be congratulated on having him in prison, and in keeping him there. There was to be no chance of a pardon or parole.

Up to that time there had never been an escape from San Quentin. I am not sure, but I believe the prison still boasts of some such record. So the ex-friends of Hartigan had nothing to worry them.

Of course I did not know all this until long afterward.

He had tried to get word to me, among others; but I had been on some far travels and had no way of learning what was going on.

The first that I did learn was when a sharp little knock, repeated rapidly, came on my door some time after 1 A.M.

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I was not asleep. It has always seemed to me a waste of time to sleep in the night when it is quiet and cool.

I had not yet got used to the furnishings of a ten thousand dollar per year apartment. There were not many of them in those days; and mine had me a little awed. When no one was around I had to practise familiarity with the furniture by sitting in meditative silence, wondering why the horde of poor brutal devils down in the holes of the earth did not swarm out and tear, seize, burn or destroy all the foolish finery of their enemies. But a bear with a ring in his nose dances to the music of a hand-organ, jigs at the twitch of a cord.

I was wondering what the gaudy clowns that owned dancing bears would do if the animals were stirred, when the low rapid knocking began, feverishly hurried.

I did not spring up and cry—

"Who's there?"

I went quietly to the door, listened, opened it suddenly, and the gun in my right dressing-gown pocket was peeping just over the edge; but immediately it ducked out of sight.

One of the reasons I am progressing nicely toward a quiet old age is because I have always taken the trouble to shoot first. "Draw last and shoot first" is as good a health maxim as I know. And one of the reasons that certain persons have knocked on my door in the quiet hours is because they thought I might want to see who was there before I was ready to shoot. Not so.

As I opened the door the girl, with a frightened glance over her shoulder, darted inside.

IV

"I'M NAN HARTIGAN—please, I mustn't be caught. Father said——"

She wore a long, olive-colored cloak and a dark tam-o'-shanter cap. A pained, anxious look was in her deeply dark brown eyes—intensely expressive eyes; and she trembled as she whispered hesitatingly—

"Father said——"

I closed the door and locked it.

"—if I came to you——"

She paused, hesitatingly, doubtful, afraid.

"—that you would—would do anything for me. It was strange——"

She stopped and scrutinized me closely, not quite sure.

She was a beautiful young woman, but seemed blessed with ignorance on the subject.

I looked at her patiently while she faltered with—

"—strange—because—because I've *heard* of you!"

It was true. My reputation was hardly such as would inspire fathers to recommend daughters to my care.

Hartigan had been proud of her, inordinately proud, and in a way had kept the motherless child out of his own life that she might be more welcome among refined, respectable people.

She had been used to seeing her father's friends turn cold at the mention of his name, and was on the alert for something of the same from me.

I pointed her to a chair, but she would not sit. She said she had been followed, she was sure of it; that she was the woman the police were looking for because of Pollard's death.

"I didn't kill him. Honest! I didn't——"

She looked hard at me, staring as if awaiting anxiously to see if I believed her. She seemed to think it would make a difference in my attitude.

I knew the smooth, elegant old ruffian, and I said:

"Well, as long as he is dead——"

And I nodded approvingly.

Old Pollard, a distinguished attorney, had a weakness for pretty girls and liked to have them around after office hours. He had a beautiful private office.

She had clutched at me in surprized gratitude:

"You believe me? You—you will help father? And—and me?"

"Yes. Not all the evidence in the world could make me believe you did it. Many things, you know. One—you don't look the girl who could——"

"Oh, but I could have!" she muttered between clenched teeth.

"And a college girl, too. No——"

"I'm done with that," she said quickly, with a little something savage in her manner. "I'm not a lady and am getting prouder of it every day. I was born on the Coast—over dad's saloon. I'd have killed old Mr. Pollard if—if—but I didn't do it. I don't know who did it!"

"No," I admitted, "you don't."

She half-gasped and peered at me with increased doubt and some puzzlement.

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"I don't understand you—your manner!"

I said that I was trying only to assure her of belief in her innocence since it had seemed important I should believe that.

Pollard had been found dead in his outer office with the back of his head fractured as if by a club with a sharp knot on it.

A pretty girl with short brown curly hair was being searched for. She wore a tam-o'-shanter hat and a long cloak. She had been seen leaving the office a few minutes before the body was discovered. Incidentally, fifty one-thousand-dollar bills he was known to have had could not be found. The newspapers had been telling all about it, repeating over and over every detail.

Pollard had many friends and there was offered some sort of reward, ten thousand dollars or fifteen thousand dollars—something almost large enough to tempt the murderer to confess, convict himself and claim the money.

At our first meeting Nan did not have time to tell much; neither did she have much confidence in me. Afterward she said that she had not liked my appearance—which, together with what she had heard of me, made her very doubtful and uncomfortable. For one thing, she said, I was not very gracious to her; my manner was not welcoming; I didn't jump up and down and swear that I would do anything for her—as every woman expects a man to do when placing himself at her service.

It made her uneasy, she said, to look at dark gray eyes in a thin face, expressionless as blank paper. And—her words for it—I had the manner of a polite undertaker in the presence of the dying.

But twice within six months her father had got word to her to find me; that I would do anything for her. The last messenger, freshly out of prison, who came to her with long instructions from her father had said:

"I tell you, Miss Hartigan, 'f you got Everhard f'r a fr'en' you ain't so bad off. When he goes after anybody he don't quit till he's 'tended the guy's funeral."

Which goes to show how a quiet man's reputation becomes exaggerated; nor was it a very reassuring thing to say to a girl who had been brought up in private schools and had slipped from a sorority house to meet the ex-convict.

Hartigan had said that she should tell me he had been double-crossed, and have me call on Pollard.

"Pollard's afraid of him—good reason to be. If Everhard goes to him, Pollard will do what he can to help me; and he can do everything," the message had said.

She had not been able to locate me; so she had gone to Pollard herself and begged for her father.

Nan was a beautiful girl. That old villain liked to have pretty girls pleading with him. He was courteous to her—very. He explained how he had disposed of all Hartigan's property so creditors could not get their hands on it; and it gradually glimmered into her dazed brain that the old rascal was using that subtlely cruel way of letting her know that her father was penniless—unless he, Pollard, should be moved to compassion. And all that she had left in the world was the little that remained in her checking account.

Pollard was an elegant old fellow. There was nothing crude or rough about him. He made villainy a fine art, and was so gracious and suave that Nan hardly knew she was being tricked and played with until—

"He asked me to come to his office at eight o'clock in the evening so we could have a long talk. I did not feel right about going, but he said that he would not have any other time for several days. I knew that every hour meant much to my poor father—besides, I remembered where I was born, and"—bitterly—"that I did not need to be careful with my reputation. Not when my father was in prison."

So she went. Pollard had two private offices. One of them was very elegant. He took her there—though all the outer offices were deserted—for the private talk. He became fatherly, and put an arm around her. He had sticky lean arms, like an octopus. He was bald and fuzzy-jawed, but was always groomed like a duke at a public ceremony. Pollard was around sixty, a fragile sort of fellow with a large head on a pipe-stem neck, with faint, fuzzy side whiskers that he cherished.

Well—so she said—just about the moment that she was terrified by discovering that Pollard had tricked her, was playing with her devotion to her father, and was trying to force upon her a hideous bargain for Hartigan's freedom—just then there came a hard knock right against the door of the private office.

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Pollard jumped up, frightened, or at least startled.

He went to the door and asked who was there.

She was very excited and almost in tears. She thought that she heard a man's voice coldly tell Pollard he wanted to see him, right away. She was not sure about the words, but remembered that the voice was cold, hard.

But Pollard became frightened. He put his hand to his lips and said, "*Shh-sh*" as he looked at her; then very hesitatingly he opened the door a little more and edged through it.

She jumped up to look for a way from the office into the hall; but there was only one door, and it opened into the next office. The office she was in was a sort of rest room.

She listened, but the door was thick and of solid wood. She could hear only one voice—Pollard's. It was excited, but she could not understand the words. Then a faint thud, a slight movement about the room.

It became quiet. She listened a long time, and did not hear a sound; and at last she timidly opened the door and peeped out.

POLLARD lay face down on the floor and the back of his head was gashed and red. He was bald and the wound showed plainly.

She was fearfully excited, and going through the room got to the hall and ran. She passed people in the hall and they looked at her in surprize, but no one spoke to her.

"I felt so miserable and alone, and did not know what to do. There was nobody that I could go to that would understand, and you can't believe how they made me feel in college after they learned that my father was in prison. The ones that tried to be nice to me were the worst because they seemed to think that I was ashamed of him and wanted their pity. But the others—even in the sorority house some of them wouldn't speak to me. I had stayed on because I was angry and I wouldn't let them drive me out. That was Friday night—I couldn't go back. I wouldn't be missed anyway until Monday, and if I didn't come back it would be no more than they had expected each time that I went out of the house."

She did not know where to go or what to do; and scarcely cared. She was embittered, reckless. Just being alive hurt; and she could not get away from the mocking remembrance that she had been born over a Barbary Coast saloon and that her baby cries had mingled with racket of pianos and drunken shouts of dance-hall girls. Her mother would not live elsewhere.

I knew all about Mrs. Hartigan and the wormwood and honey in her romance. She was a fine woman of a proud family; and, so she told me, her name was erased from the family Bible when she married Hartigan and became a gambler's wife. They did not have any better women on Nob Hill, but with a sort of stubborn bitterness she would not live elsewhere than on the Coast.

When Hartigan prospered with a saloon, dance-hall and gambling-rooms, she had refused to leave. She was not happy, but she laughed. She tortured herself to punish her family and she would not pretend to be respectable though she was about as near to an angel as women get to be this side of the stars. After the baby was born that attitude changed in a flash. Two weeks later she was moved out; and three years later she died.

Nan was anguishedly distressed. Moods swept her like changing winds. One moment it seemed that a just vengeance had struck Pollard down. The next she was terrified by the feeling that now nothing could save her father. She was heart-sickened, hated the world and was desperate—also helpless. My name came to her again and again because her father had said to find me.

A young girl, a college girl, has very limited means of locating an unobtrusive gambler; and though the ex-convict whom she met in the park had promised to find out what he could, he never sent word of any kind. He got drunk and was arrested, charged with rolling a drunk, and, being just out of "stir," was of course guilty enough to be promptly returned.

Nan had telephoned the newspapers, but they said I had not been around the city for a year or more. She had asked Pollard and the old fop had in turn asked her many questions, promised to make inquiries, then reported that he could learn nothing though the police thought I had been sent up in some Eastern prison under an alias.

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He was a remarkable liar, old Pollard.

As Nan walked the street she began to notice that men were giving her attention, and that many of the remarks she heard were addressed to her. She did not know where she was but guessed that she was not far from her birthplace. She hurried along blindly with no idea of where she was going and finally stumbled up the stairs of a lodging-house. She wanted a place to rest and think.

A bell sat on a little varnished table in the dim hall, and she rang it. A consumptive with a twisted foot and a scraggly mustache limped out and eyed her with deliberate scrutiny. She tried to appear at ease; but women up-town with paint on their faces were not more conspicuously out of their element than Nan. These days all women look alike, so that paint and plaster have lost much of their significance. The fellow looked Nan up and down in a half-baffled, inquiring way that did not add to her peace of mind. She tried to be composed and firm; but he grinned with his head half-drooped to a shoulder as she asked for a room. It was enough to have made even the gaudy ladies on the beer advertisements that adorned the walls snicker, for Nan asked for a "nice, clean, quiet little room."

Thumping with a stick and dragging his misshapen foot, he led her up the stairs and opened the door of a narrow dingy room. He lighted it for her and she showed how she felt by her silence. A strip of ragged carpet was on the floor; the narrow iron bed was covered with a splotched red comforter; a wash-stand stood against the wall with cracked pitcher in a dirty bowl, and a rickety rocker was near the window.

He asked with offensive courtesy, with a sort of amused sneer, if there was anything he could do.

Nan was frightened and angry. She wanted to turn and run; but with a flash of fierceness—like the lightning perhaps that precedes the rain-shower—she said yes, there was something. He could get out!

He laughed titteringly and went away. She could hear him coughing as he shuffled down the hall.

Nan did not cry. She cut her palms with her finger-nails and stained her lips with blood, so hard she bit them. She threw back the covers of the bed in a kind of morbid despair to see how bad it was; and found it as dirty as she expected. She shuddered, turned away and dipped her fingers that had touched the bedding into the pitcher of water; but there was nothing clean on which to wipe her hand. She sat down on the rocker, looking about with the sullenness of a trapped animal. She did not know what on earth to do, but felt that she could not go out on the street again that time of night.

She fell into a sort of weary daze mingled with nightmares that brought her into startled wakefulness again and again. It grew chilly and her cloak was wrapped tightly; but neither her heart-sickness nor half-frozen body could keep her from dozing in spite of herself.

Some time in the morning, she did not know how long afterward, the door opened; and a woman, like one of the beer advertisements grown fat and more gaudy, stood in it and looked at her while the thin evil face of the cripple peered over the woman's shoulder.

"Beat it," said the woman to him with careless authority and in a heavy, husky voice.

She came in, pulling the door shut, and grinned with a terrifying friendliness.

Nan had never seen such a creature. She had heard about them, imagined them—but the imagination is an unreliable substitute for experience.

Nan stood up, breathing hard, and moved back a little. She was terrified, not so much by a sense of danger as by an instinctive loathing, for the woman looked as a well-fed and highly painted female devil must look.

"Now, now, little kid," she began in husky friendliness. "Lonesome? Been cryin'? Weeps 're bad for lost lambs. How's a darlin' like you ever get in this dump?"

As she spoke her eyes ran over the girl with steely appraisal, and she dropped heavily on to the bed, hands to hips and with a smile less pliable and human than the twisted lips of a stone ogress.

"Come on, sweetie, tell me about yourself. I'm sympathetic. I've helped a lot a little girls. Did he run off an' leave you? I don't see nothin' on your left hand. But rings 're cheap, honey. I'll buy you one—to wear till we catch him."

She was not coaxing—only half-cynically

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playing at being friendly. Cleo Bacque was an unlovely creature, but not much of a hypocrite. Perhaps she had sense enough to know that she could not be convincing as a hypocrite.

"Men ain't worth a darn, sweetheart. They're all alike—even the one that's different. He's usually the rottenest one of the bunch. Tell me about him. I'll help you catch 'im. Who is he? I can find anybody. Leave it to Cleo."

Hesitatingly, hardly realizing what she was about, but appealing to the only name that meant anything like friendship for her, she asked—

"Could you find—find Everhard—the gambler?"

CLEO BACQUE rose slowly from the bed in open-mouthed astonishment. Her baggy eyes popped open, and with the caution of one stepping on cakes of ice she asked:

"What? Who?"

"If I could only find him!"

"Say, what you tryin' to hand me?" Cleo had lost her imitation suavity. "Mean to tell me he's the man?"

Nan was not quite sure of what the woman meant, but shook her head as she said—

"I don't know him but I must——"

Then Cleo laughed harshly, relieved and amused.

"Listen, kiddie. I don't know 'im either. I know this much about him. He's no good—a dead one. A fish. Lots a little children lose their heads over him—he's got the reputation. So you run away from home to find the gunman? Thought you could tame him, huh? Forget it, honey. He's a stewed prune. Did mama kiss you good-by when you left? He-he-ee!"

"My mother is dead," Nan said tensely.

She wanted to fall to the floor and weep; also she wanted to strike that horrible woman. So she did nothing.

The women who are camp-followers to the Legion of the Damned respect one thing, and one only in life; and that is the name of the dead.

Cleo put out her hand apologetically; but Nan backed away.

"I didn't mean—listen. I'm not so bad. How'd you come here anyway? Who are you? Where's your father?"

"In prison—San Quentin."

At that Cleo collapsed on to the bed again. She was getting too many jolts for a breathless woman threatened by a fat heart.

"Say, what's his name?" she asked alertly, listening watchfully.

"Tom Hartigan."

Cleo stood up again as if shot to her feet by a released spring.

"What!"

"Yes," said Nan, shrinking.

The woman was excited; she seemed almost angry.

"Hartigan! You—you that baby?"

She waddled among her festooned, trailing finery and seized Nan's shoulders, holding her with surprizing force, staring at her.

"Yes, sir, you've got her eyes. Your mother's eyes an' hair. Say, I heard you squall when you weren't any longer than that—" she measured off about six inches on her stout arm. "An' who in the —— got you in this dump? They'll hear from me! Tell me, honey. Your father got what 's comin' to him—mixing up in politics. But your mother—she was one white woman! Say, what's that Everhard got to do with this? He may know how to use a gun—but—but——"

Her hand slipped into the thick drift of lace over her breast and drew a dagger.

Cleo was given to melodrama. She had been on the stage at one time and played loud, breast-pounding rôles. But at that she really was a vicious and dangerous woman.

Yet Nan, feeling as helpless and alone as if adrift on the ocean, gave up her story—all of it; and Cleo whistled when she heard of Pollard, dead on the thick carpet of his office.

"Yes," said Cleo, "your father and Everhard used to be good friends. But, honey, nobody 's g ing to believe your story about Pollard. I know a woman that will know where Everhard is. She'll tell me if I lie to her. Why lie?" Cleo laughed coarsely. "You'll find out if Hazel Guigane ever finds you hiding behind that fellow's coat-tail. She hates men, she does. But she hates women worse.

"You'd better stay here—a while." She looked about the dirty room. "I'll send up some clean bedding and things. I've no place to put you and if we go to moving you around—I tell you the police are already looking for who killed Pollard. I know the police. And keep that door locked. If

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Charley tries to talk to you break something over his head."

SATURDAY morning the papers told of Pollard's death and the police were looking for the woman who had been seen running down the hall, a young woman in a cloak and tam-o'-shanter cap.

In the mean time Hazel Guigane had said there was a friend of Hartigan's trying to get in touch with me, but had to come out of hiding when he got a chance and make a sneak for it; and did I want my address to go out? Cleo Bacque had the fellow under cover. I was not making any elaborate secret of my address—merely living quietly and saying little. Anybody that came from Hartigan was welcome, though I had no idea of what was wanted.

In the mean time, also, somebody—there is always somebody doing those things—had telephoned the *Examiner* about seeing a woman of that description go into a certain rooming-house. If a paper gave attention to all the tips received it would need a regiment for a staff; and it is an odd fact that many people think of tipping off a city editor rather than the police station.

But it happened that the Saturday evening papers carried some details of sensational interest that had not come out before. The "mystery girl" was as far from being identified as ever—but fifty thousand dollars had been taken from Pollard.

When Cleo learned that she believed what she had already suspected—that the girl *had* killed him. There was every motive in the world. Hartigan had been robbed; it was only natural, almost proper, that Hartigan's daughter should rob the robber. She judged Nan entirely by what she herself would readily have done.

Nan saw in a moment that something was wrong when Cleo came late Saturday evening. She pulled the door shut with a bang, then stood cursing Charley, who had followed her up to the room; and Nan was terrified before the woman faced her.

Cleo must have been drinking a good deal, and her abuse was menacing. She pretended that she was the injured party. Nan had deceived her, made a fool of her. Nan had pulled fifty thousand dollars out of old Pollard's pocket and not said a word about it; and she, Cleo, had been to a lot of trouble and risk to help her! There—and she struck Nan in the face with the edge of the paper—was that gambler's address. It was up to Nan to shell out, pony up, come across—phrases that the girl did not understand.

Cleo screamed at her, threatened her, struck her. Nan was frightened and thought the woman crazy. She cried out.

Charley jerked open the door and angrily shouted something about "queering the game," and about Cleo being a "drunken fool."

She turned on him in a fury, grabbed at his hair and clawed his face. He was a little man, sickly and a cripple; but he beat at her with his cane, though she pushed and knocked him about. Both of them said fearful things, and their eyes were maniacal. A chance swinging blow hit Cleo along the temple and she dropped as if shot through the heart, while the murderous little consumptive reeled back exhausted, sobbing and coughing.

Nan snatched the paper from the floor where it had been dropped, grabbed her hat and cloak and ran down the hall, down the stairs, into the street.

It was the sort of transient lodging-house that did not begin to fill up until after midnight, and rackets and brawls were not often considered the business of any one not personally involved.

Tam-o'-shanters and capes were worn by many girls at that time; so Jance, when he met her, wasn't sure—though hers was the dark olive cape—enough to do more than try to get her into conversation, then follow her.

He had followed her to my apartment; and he had overheard the name Hartigan. He needed nothing more.

The police had discovered that it was Hartigan's daughter they were looking for, because Pollard's office girl remembered that Miss Hartigan, who had called some days before, answered the description of the "mystery girl."

V

IT IS not to be supposed that I had anything like the whole of Nan's story between her arrival and the coming of the police.

I am rather sure, however, that I would have done as much as I could for any person, girl, woman or man, who had come to me to escape arrest for Pollard's murder. I would not have needed their assurance of

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innocence. Even if I had thought any of them guilty, I would probably have done what I could by way of help.

When I had heard voices in the hall, I hurried Nan into the room of my friend Rawlison. At the heavy-fisted knock I made a loop with a cushion for a seat, and fastened the rope to the short iron hook set under the window-ledge.

"There is no other way," I said, pointing over the ledge. "Will you do it?"

"Yes—anything! I'll do anything."

She looked resolute, too.

Her mother had been a very resolute woman; and Hartigan was not a man to flinch or quit.

I adjusted the loop around her. It was tied with a hard knot. She climbed feet first and backward across the window ledge.

I knew that the cord had steel in it. Rawlison was a big man, broad of chest, six feet or more, with shoulders thick as oak beams; and if it was safe for him it would have been secure for three or four girls like her; but a piece of wrist-thick hemp would have made me feel more comfortable.

This young girl of refined features and accent did not flinch, though it made my toes tingle to see her go—and I do not often have so much emotion.

The rope had been fastened so that there would be no drop between the distance she could reach and the length between noose and window.

She hung within hand's reach of the ledge, swinging slightly, with only faint specks and splotches of light in the distance and a void of dimness below.

I pulled down the screen, window and blind, closed the door, then answered the increasingly impatient thumps of the police.

Then, as related, I received the police; and they departed mystified, and wanting to get their hands on the reporter.

I stood quietly by the door, and after waiting a little while quickly and quietly opened it. No one was there, or in the hall. My suspicions had been useless.

Just as I started across the room the telephone rang.

The telephone is an unsightly instrument, and does not blend in well with period furniture—manufactured at Saginaw, Mich. —so it was stowed from sight in a little box cabinet.

I answered it and recognized Hazel Guigane's voice.

"Don?—Where did you put that woman? —*Where* did you put *that* woman?—Don, *where did you put that woman!*—Why do you try to argue with me, Don? Can't you see I'm getting angry? Well, I am. And look out. The police think maybe the reporter made a mistake and that she's in some other apartment. Detectives are watching the lobby.—Oh, I know they'll find nothing. I was teasing."

That was all.

Her rooms were directly below on the second floor. It was not by chance that Rawlison in making a slide from his room would pass her window. He was one of the few men for whom Hazel Guigane had respect; and, having known him for many years, was ready in every way to help any plans for escape that he might have or make.

I tucked the telephone back into its little cupboard and closed the door. It had a sort of spring lock—you pressed an invisible button and the door opened. The contraption went with the expensive furniture.

Every light in all the rooms was burning. The officers had turned everything on and nothing off.

As I went into the room outside of which Nan was swinging, I closed the door and put out the lights so that by no chance a watcher from below, or out of some other window, would become unduly interested by seeing shadow-shapes conducting themselves in a queer manner.

I put up the window, raised the screen and peered out.

"How has it been?" I asked.

"Terrible. This is such a little rope. It cuts and I am stiff." She said it in a matter-of-fact way, not complainingly—merely saying what was so.

She hung like a fly on one thread of a spider's web. The taut cord was uneasily vibrant at the least move that she made, and swayed jerkily as her hand groped for the window ledge.

I took her hand and pulled. I caught hold of both hands. It was no use. I could not brace myself inside of the window. Then she caught hold of the ledge with her fingers and I pulled by a grip on her wrists, and when the weight was released from the noose the pillow slipped out and fell. In the silence we could hear it softly strike; and it was disturbing to be reminded of the distance that lay below.

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Also the loop had slipped from under her.

"I—I'm—so weak," she muttered.

She hung by the tips of her fingers, supported by the grasp that I had on her wrists. Not many people can long hold on to a bar where they have the full grasp of their hands, and it was doubtful if she could hang on by her fingers long enough for me to release my grip and try to catch under her shoulders. The position was wearying and desperate, but I spoke cheerfully, or tried to.

I was leaning as far forward as I dared, with my knees braced, just ready to take the chance of releasing her wrists and snatching at her armpits when I heard something smash in the apartment. It sounded as if some one had broken open a box by a stiff kick.

No one was supposed to be in there. The door from the hall had been locked.

Whoever it might be was being recklessly desperate to make that noise when he could not help but hear my voice; and there I was in a helpless situation.

I paused, listening tensely; and I heard a voice speaking into the telephone. The number—I knew it well—was police headquarters.

Some one had hid himself in the apartment, in a closet or behind a curtain, and had listened until he overheard me talking with the girl. He had evidently seen me use the telephone, and not knowing how to open the cabinet had kicked in the door to get to it.

I was not excited. I don't get excited. But I was in a hurry.

And she was saying that she couldn't hold, that her fingers were numb. With her dead weight in my hands it would be only a matter of seconds before I too would have to let go. I am not of the hero type anyway; but in this case, even had I wanted to, I could not have saved her by making a sacrifice myself.

She gasped as if plunging into cold water, and her fingers simply crumbled away from the stone ledge. The drop of her body for those six or seven inches jerked at my arms until I was nearly pulled from my uncertain balance and plunged into a hundred-foot fall across the window.

I am strong, but I had nothing of Rawlison's giant physique. He could have heaved a bull through the window by its horns.

My arms ached at their sockets, and my hands, moistened by the nervous as well as physical strain, seemed slippery. My fingers were cramped. The grip hurt her wrists.

She did not cry out, or beg me to save her. She was a thoroughbred; and suddenly I liked her very much.

The cord was dangling almost against my chin, but that helped none; for even though she grasped it, she would not have strength enough to hold, and if she did hold, her hands would be burned as she slipped. Besides, one end of it was coiled up, so that even with the leather pads Rawlison kept for use, she could not have descended below the loop. It isn't often that I make mistakes; but I had made one in not fastening a precautionary loop under her arms. I should not have been in so much haste though the police were knocking at my door when I hung her out there.

I held on for life—for a girl's life; and I heard that voice declaring to police headquarters that the girl *was* in my apartment; that he was on guard and if some one would come at once she would be found.

It was Jance of the *Examiner* talking; and it was evident that I had underestimated that reporter.

When there is but one thing to do a person must do it, however unpleasant. I called to Jance.

He answered at once:

"You guessed it, old top. Dope, eh? I've got the drop right on that door—an' I'll shoot!"

I have never been face to face with many men and failed to be convincing; but through a closed door and into suspicious ears it is very difficult. Naturally he thought that I was trying to trap him.

It was hard to explain through clenched teeth and when every nerve and muscle was strained.

"You're a clever bird," said Jance with a sort of hysterical triumph. "Just hold on a little while. The p'lice 're comin'. They'll lend a hand."

I told him he was an idiot—which he wasn't by any means; and said to shoot, make a racket, yell, bring people flying, and perhaps some of them wouldn't be cowards; that in another minute the girl would be dead if somebody did not come.

"On your honor?"

It was a stupid question; as if a man unscrupulous enough to pretend that a woman was in danger would observe an oath on his honor. But I said yes.

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I COULD hear the door-knob turn. A thin glow came from behind. Then the door was flung open, and presently Jance, who had taken the precaution of springing back, must have peered around the jamb; for he said, "Great Heavens," and rushed to the window.

"Her arm—both hands—get hold—quick!"

He leaned out and grasped the right arm.

"Pull—don't jerk—pull!"

The girl groaned slightly.

"Oh, Lord!" said Jance, trembling from excitement.

We raised her until her arms were across the ledge, then he bent forward and took hold around her back, and half-lifting and dragging, we got her into the room and laid her on the bed.

She had not fainted, but was weak, dazed, and lay quietly staring from one to the other.

"Say, but that was close!" he exclaimed friendlily, forgetting our situation.

Now it happens that I must do things in my own way or I have no luck; or what is worse, no satisfaction. I am not honest, and an adept at cheating with cards is hardly honorable. But some advantages are too unfair even for me. The situation was pretty desperate for one to think about fair play when I could have poked a gun to his head and backed him into a closet; but one of the things I have never done and will not do is to break a promise made even to an enemy.

Perhaps I don't deserve much credit for the way I treated Jance because I was confident that I would win out, anyway.

But I tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to the floor where he had dropped the gun when he saw that his help was a matter of life and death.

He was staring at Nan's face as if he had not seen her before. Perhaps he had not seen before how shapely were her features and the luster of beauty that was on them. He straightened up with a half-startled expression, and his eyes inquiringly followed my gesture to the gun.

"Pick it up—you may need it," I said.

He showed plainly enough that he didn't quite understand, but he picked it up; and saying for him to come with me, I went into the next room and closed the door when he was through it.

"All right," I explained, my hands loose at my sides. "You are a better man than I thought. You've got nerve—real nerve, Jance, but poor judgment. And if I didn't give you the drop on me, I would be acting as if the appeal to you for help was a trap——".

"But I know it wasn't and—" he interrupted.

"And for that reason you must poke that gun at my head just as if you were going to shoot. Just as you would have done if I had stepped out of the room when I heard you telephoning. Go on."

I suppose all this may appear a little melodramatic, a little super-gallant; but at the time it seemed wholly natural that I should do just as I did. For instance, I have no use for those men who think they are being honest when they cheat somebody without breaking a law; or who sneak an advantage.

I had given my word that he was not being trapped when I called to him; and anything less than forcing him to take the drop on me would have been trickery. It is easy enough to sneer at a professional gambler's sense of honor; but such as it is, I have always stuck to it, and have lost no friends. Some people who are not my friends feel safest when they have their backs to me. And I am more proud of that than of the fact that men who hate me do not like to meet me face to face.

Jance put out the gun, but his heart was not in the attitude. Somehow the two of us had been in a sort of companionship in the lifting of the girl through the window. He had lost his sense of triumph, of elation. He was not intimidated—he was simply no longer half-angry and resolute.

"Listen closely," I said. I spoke to him in a matter-of-fact way, not pleading at all, not menacing in the least.

"Nan Hartigan had no more to do with Pollard's death than you. Her father is my friend. You know where he is. She had no one else to go near or turn to. If you think I'm going to let the police have her you are mistaken. You are clever. You are probably a good shot with a revolver, but—" my hands went carelessly into my dressing-gown pockets— "we will either have to call this a draw or start shooting at each other. You know, Jance, you may get me. But it is certain—certain that you will be killed. What'd you say?"

Perhaps I was bluffing; perhaps I wasn't.

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Anyway, poker training helps in situations of the kind.

He said nothing. His face was tense and slightly pale; and his eyes looked down to the little black hole of metal that was staring toward him from over the edge of my right pocket. More than anything else, however, it was unnerving because I was supposed to be a dead shot and a gunfighter. If a man has a reputation he doesn't often need to do anything to uphold it.

I went on, more coolly than I felt:

"Since we have to make a duel of it, at the count of three we'll fire. At the first sound of the word three. Now. One—two—oo——"

His hand shook as if half-frozen as he laid the gun on the table and partly raised his arms. I was more relieved than I had any intention of letting him know. His face was strained, the expression pathetic as he said with nervous hoarseness—

"I'm a —— coward!"

At that moment somebody's knuckles struck on the door.

I looked questioningly at Jance, asking him in silence what he thought he would try to do now that the police had come.

He shook his head slightly and raised his hands higher. And suddenly I knew that he was not being bluffed and intimidated at all. Without becoming a friend, he had ceased being an enemy when together we helped Nan—or at least when he had noticed her beauty. Perhaps too he had a little sympathetic admiration for the bluff with which I baffled the police; and he had humor enough not to hold to a grudge for the way I had injured his reputation.

I put out my hand. He looked from it to my face, doubtfully; then took it, smiling impulsively. I picked up his revolver and handed it to him, and gestured for him to leave the room quickly and noiselessly.

He understood and left quietly.

I opened the door to one of the detectives who had been among those that visited me an hour before.

"Say, Mr. Ever— Richmond, I mean. We're lookin' for that *'Zaminer* feller. We gotta get him. Somebody phoned in—said he was Jance an' here in your apartment." The detective paused and looked about the room. "An' that the girl was here."

"You want to look again?"

I gave a sweeping gesture, inviting him to look to his heart's content.

"No, thanks. I had 'nough o' that. But they sent me to investigate the phone call. Just to see, you know—I guess there was nothin' to it."

I nodded approvingly. I was pleased that he thought there was nothing to it.

"Funny business, though. Jance said he picked this moll up over on Kearney. 'Member? Well, Cleo Bacque's dead over there in that roomin'-house. She was hidin' the girl—an' got a blow in the head. That's the way she killed Pollard. 'Member? Soaked him on the head. A con over there—he's been up twice an's got the con too"—the detective chuckled a little at his joke—"said Cleo was hidin' her out. Claims he didn't recognize the girl. He's a liar, of course. Said he heard her an' Cleo quarrelin'. Buttin' in just as the girl sloughed Cleo an' ducked. He tried to hold her—he's a liar, of course. But that *'Zaminer* feller wasn't so far off as we thought. An' maybe that girl *is* around here some place."

"You mean here?" I asked with what seemed to be a little surprize.

"No. I mean in this buildin'. She must be. We want to find Jance. Say—maybe he got in some other apartment an' phoned. I'll ask the switchboard down-stairs."

Having had that bright idea come to him, he started to go.

But I said, "Wait," and though there was nothing of a command in my tone, I meant wait. The complications of the situation were twisting and turning in a way that was not at all satisfactory.

I went to the telephone and jiggled the receiver.

The switchboard at night was operated by a Chinese boy whom Hazel Guigane had raised from almost babyhood. Had she told him to cut off his head and bring it to her, he would have obeyed, or have tried to; and she kept him on the switchboard at nights for reasons of her own. She wanted to know what was going on; and the boy, an intelligent, quick fellow, listened carefully.

When he answered I asked if anybody from my apartment had called police headquarters within the past hour. The question was for the ears of the detectives. Nodo's answer was not.

Of course I told the detective that there must have been some mistake; and he went away, puzzled.

He was no sooner gone than I got Nodo

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on the wire and impressed upon him the answer that he should make to all such inquiries.

VI

JANCE came from behind the door where he had listened, he said:

"Say, this is serious. Bacque—that woman—somebody ought 've—Say, do you know I'm fallin' down on my paper?"

"Yes?"

"Yes. You see, I've got some scoop—if I spring it. But——"

He stopped. Once in a while I do misjudge men. I reached into the table drawer and opened a wallet. From the wallet I took a bill and offered it to him.

"There, Jance. This'll help you forget your scoop."

He stared at it, whistled, pinched it; then pushed the money back toward me.

"A whole thousand dollars—not much bigger 'n a one-dollar bill. Never saw one before. Might be counterfeit—I'm not used to 'em. No. You keep it."

"Supposing that I made it two and guarantee they are not counterfeit. It means something to me to have you keep quiet."

He looked up at me, shrugged his shoulders and smiled as a fellow sometimes does when he is in pain.

"I'll keep quiet—but I can't take nothin' for it. I'm a newspaper man—an' I'm in Dutch. I'm throwin' the paper down if I don't cut loose and—say, *how* do you know that she didn't wallop old Pollard?"

"I know it, all right."

"Know it 'r b'lieve it? Difference, you know."

"I know it."

"How?" He was quick and snappy with questions.

"Look at her."

"Have looked. Maybe she didn't mean to kill him—just landed hard. Pollard was that kind, they say."

"Yes. He was that kind; and several other kinds. The only promises he ever kept were those that made him money. He may have kept a few of the other kind, but not willingly. You know what the police would do to the girl if they caught her—bully her, wear her out, torment her, drive her crazy."

"I know—don't I!" Jance exclaimed. "But the evidence is all against her. Lord, man, I got to have something out of this. Her father's in the pen, too. An' say—how did I come to promise to hold out on this story?"

He looked at me a little mystified; then:

"I can't keep this story out. I haven't promised."

"No," I agreed. "You haven't promised. But you will."

"Which? Promise? No. It's too big. I can't."

Apparently he did not know that I would almost as soon have gagged and tied and held him a prisoner as have offered money—except that I really liked his careless impudence and daring; and except also that I thought I could use him as well as anybody else to develop the situation.

"Supposing you saw a chance to make it bigger by holding off. Would that tempt you?"

"Yea-bo. Muchly. I'm for that. But it can't be bigger—not unless you get the real murderer. An' say—does she know who it was?"

"No. She knows less than anybody. But if you want a real sensation throw something like this into the paper: Was it Judge Rankin, one of the McFash brothers, Sam Watson or T. B. Tuerny that killed Pollard?"

He half-staggered back with a dazed exclamation.

"I don't like your brand of humor. Sensation! Explosion. Six million dollars' worth of libels, too. Not much!"

"You won't?"

"Why didn't you mention the governor an' the mayor? You ought 've had——"

"Put the governor in, too. I'm not joking."

His mouth opened and he leaned forward, standing in a strained arrested attitude.

"Not—not joking?"

"No," I assured him. "Not in the least. Each of those fat, well-fed citizens is losing weight at the rate of a pound an hour. They don't know who killed Pollard but they are willing—eager—to pay the person that did it—oh, anything reasonable—a million or so."

Jance almost collapsed. He held on to the back of a chair and with a flash of his usual impudence said:

"Say, which of us is crazy? A mill—You are good, all right. You just about

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make a fellow b'lieve anything you want, don't you?"

"Evidently not. You newspaper men have treated Pollard as a respectable and valued citizen; and every one of you knows that he was a treacherous, villainous old reprobate, a rounder and a gambler—who didn't like to pay when he lost. He was a complete rascal, and very clever—I knew him. Poker was one of his weaknesses. He thought he could cheat. He was one of those fellows that have more pleasure from winning a pot with a hand he had cheated to get than by having a run of luck. And when he played poker he lost his head."

"What's that to do with the Big Five? All the rich men in the city?"

"Nothing, perhaps. Pollard was their attorney. He was in with them. Close up to them—like a leech. He knew—well, he knew of certain deals. Helped put them through and divided the money. Shortly before Pollard's death they were gently but firmly trying to edge him out of the clique. They did not want to make him angry, but sort of pension him off. He didn't want to be pensioned. There isn't as much profit in a pension as in loot. Supposing—just supposing that he threatened to tell many things. People would believe his confession. His signature would carry weight. Now do you see why those five men might be thankful for his death?"

Jance saw. He almost jumped from the floor.

"You mean," he cried, "they had him bumped off?"

"No. Not that. Rather it should be said they had their prayers answered."

"But Mr. Ever— Richmond— Which the —— is your name? Mr. Richmond, how do you know?"

"I had part of it from Pollard himself. We were—not quite friends, but well acquainted. Very. We were much together at the poker-table."

"But how can I run any of that in the paper? It can't be done. I should say not! Nothin' to back it up."

"Don't. Just call up Judge Rankin for instance. Or any of the others. Tell him who you are. Say that Nan Hartigan telephoned in that she had a paper she wanted to give the editor if he would print it, but——"

"You said she was innocent!"

"—but she said it involved some big names, his among them—Rankin's. Of course the paper wouldn't promise anything of the kind without seeing the paper; but could the judge imagine what it was?"

"You said—" he began again.

"Then see what happens. Try it with all of the five. And she is innocent."

Jance was excited. He believed me, yet in a way did not think it could be true, and did not understand at all.

"But," I said, "you will never publish a word of it."

"Won't I! Why, I'd like to know?"

"Well, you'll either take the price they offer—or be assassinated."

He laughed.

"I'm goin' telephone each of 'em, as you said, and then listen closely. I'll know whether you're kiddin' me or not."

"Use the name of some other paper—an' somebody else's name for your own—if you want to avoid complications."

"I'll try that little thing. An' say, look here—I like you. You're o. k. But I'm not doing favors for you. I'm doin' it for——"

He pointed toward the room where the girl was.

Then he started out. I reminded him of the detectives waiting below; but he waved his arm carelessly and said:

"I can kid them into believing anything I want. I'll say I've been up-stairs—watchin' your door from the banisters. Dicks get all their theories an' most o' their evidence from newspapers."

He went out with a breezy indifference, impudent, shrewd, daring, careless and honest.

I like honest men though I have not always been one myself. I suppose that the best, the noblest men fight the devil with holy water; but I have used a little brimstone. Holy water wouldn't disturb some of the devils I have met.

VII

AROUND dawn Jack Rawlison came home.

I opened the door for him and stepped back with a questioning glance. Jack was a big, handsome fellow, fastidious about his appearance; but he looked like a drunken sailor who had got the worst of a barroom brawl.

"Grin—go on, grin," said Jack with a large sheepish smile on his own face, as he

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came in. "You've had a good night's sleep—and I've been entertaining the police and other thugs.

"Don, old boy," he said as he plopped heavily into a padded chair, "we've got the world by the tail. We've got five of the richest men in the State getting ready to hock everything down to their collar-buttons. I've been slugged, arrested, searched; oh, but I have been searched!"

He broke into an explosion of laughter, which made him look more drunken than ever, for his right eye was blackened, his jaw scratched, his hat crushed, his overcoat torn and dirty. He was rumpled and ruffled from hair to shoes.

"And Don, who do you suppose I called up after they pinched me?"

"Judge Rankin?"

"Good guess. He's the boy that told the police to grab me, too. They did. It was a good fight. They'll say it was." He held up his skinned and swollen knuckles. "If there's anything harder than a cop's head I never hit it. I used to think blackmail was easy money; but if it's all like this, I'm off the game."

I asked—

"Did you tell Judge Rankin that I won that document in a poker game?"

"I did that. I followed your instructions and I asked Hazel's price. One cold million—in cash! And Don, when the old boy slid his eye down the typewritten copy and came to the signature with the notary seal to witnesseth—Don, he didn't yell. He just turned a little more pale, took a firmer grip on the edge of the table, pressed his shaky knees together and said polite as you please, 'I'll see what I can do.'

"He did, too. He went out of the room to a telephone. I listened. Leave it to me to use my tiptoes. He called the police station; asked 'em to pick me up and give me a good searching. Said he'd hold me in the house for twenty minutes. Don, I couldn't help it. I simply had to tell him I had the original in my pocket—in Pollard's handwriting. I wanted to give him a real thrill.

"And what did the police do? They must have taken three footpads right out of the jail and lined 'em up in the shadows outside the house to wait for me. Maybe they were plain-clothes men. I don't know. Anyway they didn't expect me to put my feet in their stomachs as quick as I did. And, Don, they must have had all the reserves just around the corner. They came as if a riot call had been turned in. I had heard the judge say they weren't to hurt me—much; but I didn't have any such instructions. They got tired of obeying orders, too.

"They carted me off and went through me. I stormed around, threatened 'em with damages and I don't know what all. Finally they led me to a telephone and I got Rankin on the wire. I never let on that I knew what I know. No. I was the victim of the police and appealed to my good friend; and then and there he used his influence. Therefore little Jackie walked out a free man.

"We'll get two hundred thousand at least. You'd better sit in, Don, and we'll make it three hundred thousand at least."

I ignored the offer. I did not want to emphasize my dislike of blackmail, though I was encouraging, even aiding him.

The Pollard document had come into my hands; and because I had a personal enmity for Judge Rankin, and no respect at all for the other men also involved, I had given it to Hazel Guigane and Rawlison to do with as they pleased.

Hazel was a ruthless blackmailer. Whenever she got her fingers on a victim there was nothing left but bones. I never knew a woman that had such hatred for the world, or rather for the men in it. For though nothing can be said to make her out as an admirable woman, it would be less than the truth not to state that the victims she nailed were always wealthy and usually debauched; also, as she said, it cost money to raise orphans. She had been notoriously connected with the opium traffic until, having got her fingers around the pocketbook of a very wealthy U. S. senator, she forced him to let her have charge of his new and extravagantly fashionable apartment house.

Jack said:

"I've got to tip Hazel off to the good news. Hello! What's this? Been having some excitment too?"

He looked up from the broken cabinet that Jance had kicked in to get to the telephone.

Then and there I told him all of what had happened.

"You have that girl in there, now?" Jack asked, lowering his voice.

I nodded.

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He gave a low long-drawn whistle and looked at me from the corners of his eyes.

"If Hazel finds it out—" he began in a tone of deep warning.

"She will find it out very soon. Hazel must take her, keep her, dress her up, introduce her as a sister."

"You're crazy, Don. You know men—but women! Hazel will shoot you. Let me do the talking to her."

I asked a little frostily—

"Why you?"

He laughed and brought his fist to the arm of his chair.

"I'm not blind—and Hazel doesn't care how many stray maidens I protect, fight for, die for. But you—you try dying for one and see what happens!"

For a man of his years, experience and ability, he talked much nonsense. I told him so; but he seemed only amused.

I thought I would knock some of the mirth out of him, and said—

"You understand, of course, that our little blackmail plot is off."

"What!"

"That Pollard document is the one thing that will get Hartigan out of San Quentin. The one thing that will convince Pollard's friends that he met his death by accident and make them drop the case against the girl. The one thing that will make them eager to restore Hartigan's property. Hartigan was your friend, Hazel's friend, too. We can't double-cross him. It would be doing that when there is such a chance to help him. What do you say?

"I say you are crazy," he exclaimed without anger. "You try telling that to Hazel and see what happens to you. Don, you're blind as a boiled owl and hard-hearted as a turnip. The only reason you are alive and in good health is because no woman has meant anything in your young life. She has been perfectly willing to lie down and let you walk all over her as long as you don't look at *any* woman—but now——"

I asked:

"She? Of whom are you talking? I never stepped on anybody."

"Oh, go to the devil," he said. "I'm too sleepy to care whether you're subtle or stupid. Tell me about it when I wake up. But personally I don't feel that Hartigan was such a friend that I can afford to lose a hundred thousand—not when you are going to get yourself plugged on account of his daughter."

He left me sitting in moody speculation as to how much of what he said was jest, and whether or not he would object to losing the money that could be blackmailed out of the Rankin crowd.

That was the only part of what he had said that interested me. As for the nonsense he talked about Hazel—it was not worth the trouble of wondering what he meant. I knew Hazel better than any of my half-dozen sisters.

VIII

I MUST pause here to make a few personal remarks. An embittered Frenchman has said that men talk but little when vanity does not prompt them; and if it is vanity to feel self-sufficient toward any emergency that comes upon you, I have a good deal of it. When I am no longer able to take care of myself without calling on lawyers, policemen or friends for protection, I will then be nothing more than a little tin-horn gambler sneaking a livelihood from "private" clubs.

But I do this, and people who have come in contact with me know it: I do what I think ought to be done, without much regard for who is hurt or how much money is made or lost. And I do not know much about philosophy or ethics; but I know this: In a long and varied experience, the only really dangerous men I have come against have been those who felt that they were in the right—either in defense of something they cherished or in avenging a wrong. And a great deal of what people have taken for courage on my part has been nothing but the knowledge that I was doing something that ought to be done; and it is pretty hard to stop any man when he feels that way; especially one who does not care about his reputation or his bank-account; and who believes that he will die when his time comes and not before.

I am cold-blooded and not easily excited; but nothing comes so near to exciting me as the impudence of rich scoundrels who think because they can buy lawyers, even judges, and the high places of government, that they can with impunity be as unscrupulous as they please. I am, or was in those days, as dexterous a card-shark as there was anywhere; but to the best of my knowledge

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I never fleeced an honest player. And in much the same way and for the same reason I would go to some trouble to jolt citizens like Judge Rankin, the McFash brothers, Watson or Tuerny.

With Rankin I had an old personal account: to relate it would make a story of length in itself. The gist of the affair is that a half-drunken professional bad man sobered up enough before he died to whisper confessionally the name of the man who had put him up to get me; and the name was Rankin's. It grew out of Rankin's attempt to hang an innocent boy for the crime of a thug that stood in with the crowd.

The thug, I suppose, had done so many jobs for Rankin's friends that they wanted to save him for other work. Rankin knew the boy was innocent. He knew that I knew that he knew it; and after the professional bad man died because a bullet came too close to his heart, the thug was found guilty, sentenced to be hanged—and, of course, pardoned. But the boy was saved, which was what I wanted.

When I got hold of the Pollard document I could have had a more spectacular revenge on Rankin by ruining him in public—if it is possible to ruin the reputation of rich men; which I doubt. Unless closely watched, he and his fellow millionaires would have got the document into court as evidence, as Exhibit A; then they would have substituted a copy in forged handwriting and have been vindicated. Any such move on my part would have been like giving the devil a choice of weapons. I preferred making his life, and his associates' lives, miserable by blackmail. Perhaps it was because I was in no need of money that I was not in the least tempted to share in the blackmail.

I have found that a man must distrust any vengeance that makes money for him. Mine is a very small and obscure conscience, but I keep it clear.

I no more believe that the affairs of life, its so-called accidents and coincidences, are the result of chance than I believe that a haphazard chance created a universe full of design. I am not at all theological, but perhaps a little superstitious. So when Nan Hartigan rushed upon me for shelter in the friendship I had for her father, there was nothing to be done but to use the all-powerful Pollard document honestly and force justice from a lot of rich highbinders. I felt rather strongly that something more than mere luck had put that amazing document in my hands; and it was no longer a matter of blackmail—it had become a matter of retribution.

IX

JACK RAWLISON left me and went into the bathroom where he sang to himself as he splashed in the hot water. Why a man usually sings in the bathroom I do not know; but most men try to be musical when the water is running. It indicated that he was untroubled; though now and then he paused abruptly, and I knew as well as if I was watching that at such times he was bending to the mirror and examining his discolored eye and jaw.

I did not stir. Presently he came out in a brocaded gown, twirling the silken tassel, a cigaret between his lips, and stared at me amusedly; then he said:

"I wouldn't insult you for the world, Don. For one thing, you've always got one of those blasted guns within reach. But I can't help remarking on your resemblance to a Government mule. You are stubborn as a dead elephant. Nothing will move you but dynamite. And Hazel Guigane is only another name for dynamite. She is insanely jealous of you—and you know it!"

I said that I knew nothing of the kind; but he put his hands to his ears and disappeared in my bedroom.

Through the closed door he shouted that he would bite the leg off anybody that awakened him before noon; and like most amiable jolly fellows, Jack was surly as a sore-tailed bear if he did not have his sleep out.

I tapped quietly on the door of the room where Nan was, but she did not answer. From long waiting and utter weariness she had fallen asleep.

I called the Chinese boy who watched the exchange and asked him to let me know when Madame Guigane was up and could see me. Then I made myself comfortable in one of the big upholstered chairs and fell into the half-doze that passes for sleep to men that from the long habit of keeping one eye open in bed have almost forgotten what a deep sleep is like. One of

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the bravest men I ever knew never went to bed until he had spread newspapers over the floor; and I have sometimes borrowed that trick of using newspapers to warn me of intruders, though unless unusually weary I am the lightest of sleepers.

Presently there was a faint click at the door. Some one had tried the knob. I was fully awake in an instant but remained motionless.

Then came a gentle tapping, a knocking. I sat still.

There could be one reason only for furtiveness. Some one was knocking just loud enough to attract attention if anybody in the apartment was awake, but did not want to disturb anybody that happened to be sleeping.

I felt that it would have been almost discourtesy on my part to interfere with the plans of so considerate a person; so I remained as if I had heard nothing.

In a half-minute or such matter I heard a soft grinding; and I knew precisely what was up before the spiral bit of metal came through the door.

The burglarious party was not taking nearly so much of a risk as may at first seem. It was early Sunday morning in a fashionable apartment house. No one was likely to pass through the hall; and any competent burglar, if left alone with the proper tools, can in something less than fifteen minutes go through any door-lock that has yet been devised. There is no such thing as a burglar-proof lock—at least not on a wooden door.

Whether or not the gentleman—or gentlemen—outside knew how my rest had been disturbed through the night, I could not say. I was sure that he was aware that Jack had but recently got to bed; and it was evident that the burglarious gentleman felt that he had no time to lose.

The lock of the door was controlled by the pressure of a button under the latch. When one button was pressed down the outer knob was held firm, immovable, though the inner knob readily opened the door when turned. It was the common sort of better class of lock—the sort by which a million rooms are supposedly well-guarded.

In a few seconds a hole had been bored at a downward angle about three inches above the inner knob; then the bit was withdrawn and a rod of jointed steel was thrust through the hole, and the steel opened like forceps and began delicately to feel for a grip on the knob.

It took some time, four or five minutes, for the little mandibles to get a firm grip, then by some screw-like attachment at the other end the grip was made vise-like.

Then, as easily as if one had his fingers on the knob, the steel rod—its flexible joint made rigid when the mandibles were screwed fast—turned slightly and the door was unlocked.

It was neatly and cleverly done. I had become so interested that pushing off my slippers so that I would be less likely in my bare feet to disturb the visitor, I had approached the door and closely observed every detail.

So it happened that when the door was slowly, cautiously pushed open I was standing behind it and concealed from the swiftly inquiring eyes that played about the room.

A rather neat-appearing man of middle height came in, but at first I could see nothing but his back for he did not look behind him while closing the door. But when he had gently closed it I spoke to him. I spoke softly, since it was evident that he did not like noise; but in spite of my courtesy he was greatly startled. He sprang almost straight into the air and wheeled and came down with both hands up while his own gun fell with a soft thud on to a thick rug.

He was about the most surprized man I had seen for many days; rather intelligent-looking fellow, too, well past his youth and quite old enough to know better than come prowling in my rooms. He stared as if by no means sure whether I would shoot at once or wait a few minutes. He had dark eyes, a rather flat nose, a well-trimmed bristling mustache; his jaws were a little flabby, his lips thick, and by the cast of his face an experienced observer would know at a glance that he was a life-time crook.

He did not say anything, though he had given a loud gasp; but wisely seemed to think that I would take charge of the conversation when I got ready. However, there was on his surprized face the trace of an expression that I had taken a rather unfair advantage of him. I haven't a doubt that when burglars organize their union they will demand that people who hear them at work shall make a noise, cry

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"Police" and otherwise assist them to escape.

"ALL right, what is it?" I asked sharply.

He hesitated a moment, then said: "You've got me dead to rights. Call the police."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," I told him.

And he did not know how to take that. He felt that he was into some kind of mystery. He did not ask the question, but he might as well, for it was so apparent on his face that he wondered why I should not call the police.

"Because you wouldn't undertake a daylight job of that kind—" I indicated the door —"without having been urged into it by somebody that assured you you had nothing to fear from the police. You thought Rawlison would be asleep. You probably thought the same of me—if you gave me a thought."

He was nervous of voice as he asked what was to be done with him.

"Do you really want to know?" I asked with a suggestion of menace.

He nodded as he swallowed a few times.

"Then just refuse to tell me who put you up to this."

"I—why—it was this way—I——"

He stopped; but I said nothing. He could take his time, but he had to finish and if he had the presumption to lie—well, it would be his lookout.

"I'm a stranger here."

He got it out as if it explained something. I lifted my eyebrows a very little and let him think what he pleased. Though he had the loose jaws of the talkative type, words were coming hard.

"Just got in from New York—last we—month," he blurted hopefully.

It did not bring the response he expected. In fact it brought no response at all. I looked at him, and that was all.

"And—and I've been unlucky——"

His voice had a bit of a whine. He thought to touch my sympathy, for he drew his face into a grimace that was supposed to represent undeserved misfortune. He was unlucky, decidedly so, or he wouldn't have been mixed up in my affairs.

His name, he said, was Wallace—Fred Wallace. He was from New York. Well known in New York, he was. But he'd had trouble. Seemed like he was always having trouble lately. Didn't understand it. Be hanged if he did.

Well, sir, he hadn't been in Frisco—he called it Frisco—more'n ten hours before two plain-clothes men grabbed him. Knew him for Fred Wallace. He worked hotels. Was considered the best in the country at working hotels. He c'd go through any door in the country an' never wake a sleepin' cat—do it in five minutes. He was an artist, he was. Give 'im a little time and not the slickest dick in the country could guess how he went through. No sir. He'd slip a newspaper under the door to catch the bits of wood from the auger, then when he'd opened the door he'd fill the hole with colored putty and dab it with a touch of quick drying varnish—an' unless the detective was on to the trick he never would guess how the job had been done.

Well sir, these two dicks knew him. They took his address and each of them accepted a fifty-dollar bill; and in turn they advised him to tip them off when he made a haul. Which was all right, that being a square and fair way of working with the police. That was the way he had always tried to work with the New York cops, but some of them fellows had gone to playing the stock market and expected their "friends" to make good the losses.

Well, sir—Wallace talked fluently enough after he was started—this morning there was a banging on his door, and he opened it. He hadn't pulled anything, so his conscience was clear. He'd been looking the ground over, you know. There was his two friends, the dicks. He started to explain that he hadn't touched a lock, but they told him to cheer up for there was a safe job that had to be attended to right away quick. A thousand clear an' no chance to lose was what they promised.

All he had to do was to get a paper and pick up anything loose he happened to see.

The two fellows, he said, told him everybody would be asleep so he would have it easy. Of course he couldn't refuse. He meant no harm to me at all; but he'd been told to come—etc., etc., etc.

And I knew that most of what he said was the truth, and scarcely needed to have him say anything to know just about what had happened.

The group of capitalists had become excited. The police in those days—they

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haven't changed—seemed to think they owed special consideration to rich men; and as they are sworn to defend life and property it is not unreasonable to suppose that those citizens with the most property are entitled to the most consideration. The McFash brothers were the political bosses of the city—one was a Democrat, the other a Republican, and they were twins; and Rankin was a close associate. The group were as intimate as peas in a pod; and above all things they wanted the Pollard document.

It is a fact I have often noticed that rich crooks have but two ways of dealing with an enemy: they buy or bully him. When they try to outwit him they indulge in some such clumsy affair as employing an expert lock-breaker to blunder for them. They lack the finesse and dexterity of men who treat life as a chess game and not as a stock market; and they are incredibly crude, even simple-minded.

With the coming of Wallace I saw that they had lost their heads altogether and would hardly stop at any desperate play. Probably the attempt would soon be made to arrest both Rawlison and me on some trumped-up charge—or more likely one, if not both, of us would be kidnaped. That is, the attempt would be made and the document named as the price of ransom. I was less afraid of the attempt than desirous of being annoyed; so nothing was more natural than that I should turn Wallace into my agent to annoy, even to torment them.

I understood fully the sort of man that he was, and I made some remarks calculated to sting what little pride he had. Then I told him plainly the nature and value of the document he was supposed to steal. I pointed out that he owed nothing to the men who had forced him into the job, and inquired if he wanted to turn the tables and play for high stakes.

He did. Of course he did. His eyes grew bright and the jaw muscles worked nervously as he listened.

I flattered him a little by saying that I was a good judge of character. I am, too. I said that I could use him. And I did use him.

I went to my large wallet and pulled out a little manuscript with Pollard's name signed to it and a seal in the corner. I gave it to Wallace and said:

"I'm trusting you. You can play a good joke on those fellows and make some money if you handle it right. I suppose your detective friends are waiting for you down-stairs. Yes, I thought they would be. All right. Tell them that you found me awake. They won't be surprized at that, My name is Richmond. Sometimes known as Everhard."

"What!"

He stepped back with eyes half-bulging; then with the recovery of his breath began to curse the detectives for running him into my apartment.

"No wonder," he said, "they waited down-stairs! Lord, if I'd known—you!"

No doubt he was deliberately flattering me by his emphasis; but then he had good reason for wanting to be agreeable. Besides, he had guessed the reason why they let him do the job alone.

"Now then," I went on, "you take this. The men that want to destroy Pollard's confession are worth millions. You pretend to the detectives that you didn't have a chance to search—shake them off. Go into hiding somewhere. Understand? Then telephone Rankin or the McFash brothers, Watson—any of those fellows—that you have a little manuscript document—read them a few lines here and there—that you want to sell. If you handle it right it will be easy money. You may not have known it, but they are the people who really got you into this job. Here's a chance for revenge. I'll trust you to hold them up for what you can get; then you and I will get together somewhere and come to a settlement. What do you say?"

He said it was the greatest idea that he had ever heard of. His eyes ran down the manuscript and he quickly saw the cash value of the information therein. Pollard had been cynically explicit and to the point. Wallace's face glowed. His whole manner became agitated. It was the biggest thing he had got his hands on in many a day, and he promised over and over and over to do the right thing by me.

I gravely repeated that I was a good judge of character and knew exactly what to expect from him.

But he nearly wilted under sheer astonishment when I said that the price already determined on for the document was a cold million, and asked a little earnestly if he thought he could negotiate in a deal of that magnitude.

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Oh, yes, he could. Certainly. Leave it to him.

He whistled and gasped, folded the paper, opened it and read a line or two, folded it again, thrust it into a pocket, patted it, took it from that pocket and put it in another, changed it about as if the thing were hot and uncomfortable wherever he put it; and I had practically to thrust him out of the door to get him to leave.

He went, and I closed the door quietly, and returned to my chair to meditate.

I knew very well that, barring an accidental meeting, I would never see Mr. Fred Wallace again.

HE HAD a perfectly authentic copy of the Pollard document, made by a friend of Rawlison's who was a competent forger; but the seal in the lower left-hand corner was that of some defunct wildcat corporation in which Rawlison had once been a director or something. The notary's signature had been forged also. Pollard had been very crafty in having the signature witnessed by a notary; and of course it had been done without his having read the document.

But I had no reason to care how many people knew of the document and its contents, or how heavily that group of rich fellows were bled. It was up to them to protect their reputations the best they could; and my grip on them was just as tight as ever as long as I retained the original.

It pleased me to have them worried. It was not only pleasing but it would divert their energies from me and Rawlison for a time.

Jance would telephone that Nan Hartigan had a document signed by Pollard that she wanted his paper to print.

Then their agent Wallace would seem to have double-crossed them by offering for sale the paper they had put him up to steal.

They would think that Rawlison and I had lost control of the document and were no longer to be attacked; though when the time came I could very easily correct their views on that question.

I try always to keep the other fellows worried; and there was doubt as to the worrying they would do when everybody in the city seemed to know of the Pollard document and have it! But the minute they got their hands on the original, the instant that it was destroyed, they were safe. They could prove everything else a forgery, bring suits for libel, declare themselves the victims of unscrupulous enemies, win sympathy and vindication.

It was unheard of that a lawyer would be so depraved as to use professional secrets for the purposes of blackmail; and nobody would believe that Pollard had done so if the original manuscript to which the signature was sworn to by a notary could not be produced.

And I could produce it at any time. Yet I could be searched, the apartment could be searched, everybody could be searched, my safety-deposit box — everything and everybody connected with me could be searched, and it or any trace of it would never be found. No one knew where it was but myself. Yet it was in a very simple hiding-place, one available to almost every man and woman in the country and about as securely guarded as if the little box were surrounded by a regiment of marines. Why, even the key to the little box was being taken care of for me by the same impregnable guards.

I have often wondered at the stupidity of people who think some secret protected when they stow it in a safety-deposit box and hide the key under the mattress where it is sure to be found.

X

THAT morning I had breakfast with Hazel Guigane.

She was a tall, well-built dark woman with a dazzling blond wig. There was a good deal of mystery about her, and I have heard various conjectures as to who she really was, from where she came and why. At one time it was reported rather insistently that she had been the child-wife of a notorious rich man in the East. Almost every one who met her wondered about her history; but it was only after one really knew her that she seemed incomprehensible, with her orphans and heartlessness.

To me all women are rather incomprehensible. A man's mind is a good deal like a row of dominoes on end. Knock one over and you know which will fall next. But you—or at least I—can't tell what will happen when anything is knocked over in a woman's mind. There was a time when I did not have so much wisdom. I thought

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women a little queer, but did not realize that they were about as uncertain as that piece of fireworks known to my youth as a "nigger-chaser." Put a match to a nigger-chaser and it would jump a zigzag course at the four points of the compass; and you jumped too.

Nodo had given her my message and she asked me down to breakfast at eleven. Jack Rawlison still slept, but Nan was awake and uneasy. Nightmarish fancies troubled her, and she eyed me a little distrustfully. My reputation was not good and I haven't the faculty of being gracefully agreeable; and she was a frightened, lonely, distressed girl who had suddenly ceased to have faith in human nature and I could see in her dark eyes the fear that I was getting ready to trick her.

I told her to be patient and calm, that in a few hours she would be comfortably taken care of and in a few days have all of her father's affairs settled as she wished. That assurance almost terrified her for she thought that I was deliberately lying. I told her to be ready to come down-stairs when I telephoned, but to leave the cape and hat behind and not to act as if she was being hunted but as if she belonged in the place.

Then I went to Hazel's apartment.

Hazel had but few friends and she would have no help around her but Chinese. I think she liked the Chinese because they are the least meddlesome of people.

In some way, which was unusual for a woman—but she was an unusual woman—she had made friends among the influential men of Chinatown. She spoke their language and seemed to understand them; and I suppose that the basis of the friendship was some service she had done some of them. Not all Chinamen are grateful, but a grateful Chinaman is about as unshakable as anything can be.

Rawlison, who had known her many years and was one man that she trusted, called her a stunningly beautiful woman. I scarcely thought so. She was rather startling in her large, brilliantly blond wig and enormous black earrings; her features were well formed, but she had too much the expression of a cold, implacable woman. She was not really cold-hearted, but she was implacable.

The first thing she said as I came in was—

"Don—" she poked an accusing finger at me—"what did you do with that girl?"

"She is up there in the apartment."

Hazel stepped back quickly. She had not expected that, and wasn't sure that I was not joking as she had been.

"Up there—now?"

I said of course.

"She's been there—all night?"

"From about one o'clock."

She looked at me a long time, her dark eyes scrutinizing my face skeptically, and at last she said, "I don't believe you."

So right then and there I asked if she wanted to be convinced; and as she said that she did, I called up and told Nan to come.

I had intended to explain the situation before having her come, but I am a little susceptible to the dramatic moment and besides I supposed that Nan would want her breakfast.

Nan came in hesitatingly, as if walking along a dangerous trail. She was tired, weary, heartsick; but that added something pathetic to her beauty, for her beauty was then more inescapable than when I had first seen her, flushed and excited. The dark eyes were widened and brightened as if she had a fever.

She was disappointed in Hazel and a little afraid of her. Before strangers Madame Guigane was unbending, rather haughty. I have never seen a barbaric queen on the stage that seemed to play the rôle one-half so well as she did in life. I don't refer to the feathers and glitter of stage queens, but to the imperious manner, the severe boldness and sudden impulses. It made no difference who a man or woman was, how prominent, how rich; if Madame Guigane got her talons into that man or woman she was pitiless—yet scattered about the country were a dozen if not more orphans, most of them snatched up out of the gutters or some such places, whose expenses she paid monthly.

I introduced Nan as Tom Hartigan's daughter and said—

"You know Hartigan was a friend to me when I needed one."

"Yes—oh, yes. I know," Hazel answered without seeming to have heard, twisting a jade pendant between thumb and finger as she stared at Nan. "Cleo Bacque sent you here. Yes, I see how it happened. I see. Don! How much did you pay the police not to find her last night?"

I told what had happened.

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Hazel laughed as if only partly amused.

The breakfast was a rather solemn affair. Nobody seemed to be hungry. I never am, so a cup of coffee and a biscuit is about as much as I ever care for. Nan took coffee only, and Hazel broke the biscuit without tasting a crumb of it. Yet it was a big breakfast, with iced grapefruit, hot, flaky biscuits, bacon, eggs, sirup and wine jelly. The Egyptians had a custom of bringing a mummy to a feast, probably so everybody would get too drunk to care about the grisly guest. Our breakfast was as if held in a tomb.

When Hazel had left the room for a minute to attend to something, Nan whispered:

"Oh, I am afraid of her. She is worse than that Cleo."

I was not sure that Hazel had not listened and overheard, for when she came back there was a kind of forced cheerfulness about her.

The breakfast was served by a withered old Chinaman, a mute, who had attached himself to me before Hazel asked for him. I don't know how old Yang was, but age made no difference to him.

XI

WHEN Hazel got me alone, after taking the girl into a room and telling her to lie down and rest, I could not imagine what made her seem so angry. She called Nan a stupid little schoolgirl; and I didn't deny it. She said, too, that I was stupid in taking risks for her.

"That girl never struck anybody—much less hurt them," she said almost scornfully. "No jury would convict her. Not if she cried a little; and she would. She is that kind. The best thing for her, Don, is to stand a trial and have it over with. Can you afford to protect the children and grandchildren of all the people that ever spoke a friendly word to you—your friends, like Hartigan?"

I said that I very nearly could.

"A lot you know of friends, Don."

"But Hartigan——"

"I know. He loaned you a dollar or something when you were a child and hungry. Now just what do you propose to do?"

I told her. Nan was to make Rankin and his crowd think that she had forcibly taken the Pollard document, and they were to bear down with all their weight to get her father out of San Quentin and restore, or indemnify him, his property.

Hazel nodded thoughtfully while her eyes, aslant, regarded me disapprovingly.

"And what," she asked, "do Rawlison and I get out of it?"

"Nothing."

I said it coldly. I was surprized at her. She might be avaricious as she pleased, but she had no right to be so with me.

"The girl gets everything, eh? And yet you turned that document over to me."

"No. A copy of it."

"The same thing. Now you go back on your promise." Then, a little jeeringly, "I thought you never broke a promise!"

"I don't."

I said it quietly and stood up.

She was looking at me from under her eyelids and tapping the table with the fingers of her right hand.

I said:

"You told Rawlison to demand a million. You knew you would never get it. You didn't expect it. How much, actually—and as a business proposition—did you expect as your share?"

Hazel lifted her head. Her lips moved quiveringly, and whether she was trying to keep from smiling or swearing I could not tell.

"Well," she said harshly, as if I was one of her victims, "at least ten thousand out of each of them—as my share. In my business—" she pronounced the word cynically— "I have to ask a hundred per cent. more than I expect to get."

"And the board and room for this girl for—say a week? How much?"

She laughed half-angrily, saying:

"You *are* stupid. Board and room—me? Pay me that! I don't want her, but—" she added with an irritating tone as if more than half-joking—"of course if she is a friend of yours—oh, well, she doesn't seem to eat much. Say a hundred dollars a week."

"All right, say it," I told her. "And here——"

I took the large wallet from my pocket. I was disappointed in Hazel. I was angry, too. I removed a sheaf of crisp bills and laid them on the table by her fingers.

"—here is your share. Fifty thousand. I will settle with Rawlison too. And the

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girl—do you want her money in advance? Hartigan was a friend to me, and nothing that can be put into terms of money can ever get me out of the debt I owe him."

I turned to the door. I was through. Like almost all the women I had known, she had shown an unexpected, a disappointing phase of character in a crisis.

I was passing through the door when she cried, "Don!"

The mere name, or a mere appeal, would not have caused me to turn, much less to stop. But there was a quality in her voice that I had never heard before and I had seen her in all moods from gaiety to anger; but nothing so like terror as rang in her tone.

I looked at her.

She had crumpled the bills and was pressing them against her waist as if in an instinctive effort to conceal them. Her eyes showed the same thing that had appeared in her voice. She seemed frightened, almost terrified; and fear of any kind was not associated with Hazel Guigane.

"Shut the door—please. Quick."

She seemed afraid that her voice would be heard, and spoke low and tensely, at the same time looking about like one in alarm from eavesdroppers.

I did close the door and I took a step nearer to her. I did not think that she was acting, but one can never be sure with a woman, at least not with such a woman as Hazel.

She looked at me as I had never seen her look before. The alarm left her face and it grew accusingly tense and hard. The money was gripped in her two hands, and she held it a little way in front of her as if about to shove it against me.

"Don!"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Don!"

I waited, all attention.

"Don, you told me you had never seen that girl until she came to your room this morning."

"Yes. I said that."

She almost jumped at me and came so close her face was not more than a few inches from mine. She half-whispered furiously:

"You lie! You lie! You think I'm a fool?"

I said that I had never thought so before, but——

"Don't try to be amusing with me!" Her head shook so menacingly that the long earrings swung vibrantly. "I always believed you—and you're nothing but a man. Like all of them. You lie—lie—lie! Why don't you say something? Why don't you do something?"

I told her that unless she quit talking nonsense, and did it quickly, that I would do something—leave the room and let her have her hysterics in peace. I was angry, but I was quiet; I didn't glare, hiss, grind my teeth nor clench my fists. I could not imagine what had brought on this attack of lunacy.

"You — you — " One of her hands fastened claw-like on the breast of my coat. She was breathing slowly, deeply; and her breath was hot against my face. The dark eyes, full of angry lights, stared searchingly. And she whispered with a kind of bitter triumph—

"You were in Pollard's office with that girl—you—this money—that Pollard confession—you killed him yourself!"

I did not make a flicker of movement. She expected me to make a denial; but it would have been useless for she was in no mood to believe anything but what she thought; but as I did not make a denial, she cried—

"Ah, you admit it!"

I said in so many words that I admitted nothing of the kind.

"Don—" her manner became almost reproachful—"you won't trust even me? You killed Pollard, didn't you? Tell me! You knew the girl was there—and you knew the sort of fellow Pollard was. You killed him. Didn't you? Tell me. Please."

I said—

"No."

She flamed up with:

"You lie! You did. You did! I might have known it when I first read that confession of his. I did know it when I saw this money—fifty thousand. And you throw it to me to protect that scared little schoolgirl! There——"

She threw the crumpled bills at my face.

"And Cleo Bacque did not send her to you. It was a man that wanted to see you. Cleo said it was. You have had her in your apartment. Rawlison will tell—no, he won't tell me. You men lie for each other. I don't need to be told, *anything*. I have eyes!"

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Her manner was wickedly triumphant; and as I knew there was nothing I could say that would have any influence on an angry woman, I did not try to argue and I would not quarrel. I never quarrel with man or woman, though a man has to be drunk to be as unreasonable as an angry woman. I did say that she couldn't have got much farther from the truth if she had tried to evade it instead of guess it; and I said that I would take the girl back to my apartment until I could find some place else for her shelter.

Hazel laughed scornfully:

"Oh, no, you won't. The precious little darling will stay right here with me. I'll get the truth out of her or——"

She did not finish, but I knew what she meant.

And what could I do? Let any one thoughtfully consider the situation and he must see that I could not do much of anything. To have tried to overpower her would have been to raise a commotion that would have brought the Saxon Arms about our ears. To have pointed a gun at Hazel would have been stupid. She knew that I would not shoot her and she was not easily terrified by real dangers, much less by threats of mine. On the other hand, had she pointed a gun at me I would by no means have been sure that she would not use it. I have never, at any time, had the least difficulty in convincing any man that it was dangerous to oppose anything that I was determined on; but it is almost useless for me ever to threaten a woman with violence. I haven't been able to understand why it is, but so it is.

And I did not waste time with threats, requests or argument with Hazel; by which I know that she was disappointed, for women love to quarrel, particularly when they have the upper hand.

I turned to the door again without a word.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded, her disappointment very apparent.

"Nothing," I said, and went out.

XII

WHEN Rawlison learned what had happened, he put his feet on the arm of a chair, blew cigaret-smoke at the ceiling and meditated with a grin on his face.

"Hazel doesn't care as much for you as I thought," he said with the air of one who has miscalculated.

I waited for him to explain.

"No," he went on thoughtfully. "Not nearly as much—she didn't shoot you!"

I asked him to be sensible. He said a man never was more sensible; and that there were really a few things in the world that I didn't know about, or how to manage.

"And besides, even I have wondered how the devil you did get that remarkable paper from Pollard. If I had known about the money I would have believed the same—that is, pretty much the same as Hazel does. Understand," he added quickly, "I am not asking anything."

I told him this:

"Pollard liked poker but he didn't like to pay. He and a card-shark by the name of Sandys—you may know him—ran in a cold deck on me. After the argument was over there was very little cash in sight, but Pollard was so sure that he could steal a better hand than I that he had a check for fifty thousand dollars in the pot. After the show-down he thought of course that Sandys had double-crossed him, and would have called us a pair of cheats if he had not been afraid lightning or something like it would strike him. Sandys was surprized at Pollard, and went off with him, pleading to be believed; but of course he wasn't.

"Pollard stopped payment on the check. That's about all that happened."

Rawlison had been listening closely, leaning forward. The cigaret had burned almost to his motionless fingers. He nodded slightly and straightened up.

"I see. Yes. You sent the check to Pollard and told him to cash it or——"

"No. There was no 'or' about it. I simply sent word that I would call some time within the next few days and would expect the money. I called, and got the money. He apologized for the way he had acted. He didn't count the money—just handed me wallet and all. He was very excited. Seemed afraid of something or other. Almost out of his head."

"Yes," said Rawlison. "You have a way of half-shutting your eyes that makes a fellow get all agitated. Pollard was the sort that is afraid to get hurt, and a gun would scare——"

"There was no gun."

"No, but there was a gunman! That

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was worse. Understand me, Don. I am not asking any questions. Don't think I am. But I am just wondering if you meant to tell me when it was that you collected the money."

I had no objections to telling him anything, so I said that it was Friday evening about a half-hour before his body was found.

"How'd it happen, Don? You never hit a man on the back of his head in your life. I know that. How did it happen—you do know, don't you?"

"Yes. I never receive money without counting it. I opened the wallet—just laid it on the table and opened the flap. Pollard said, 'Oh, great God, give me that!' and he jumped like an angry cat. I thought he had lost his head. He was clawing at my arm and trying to snatch the wallet. I never like to give up anything until I know why. Besides, I had a right to the money. You know, he was a skinny little old fellow with a big head—like an egg on a pipe-stem. I took him by the throat and held him at arm's length while I looked at him to see what was the matter. I was not gentle but I did not try to hurt him.

"He could hardly talk, but he was begging for the wallet back and promising something or other. I told him to be still and that when I had counted the money he could have the wallet back. I let go of him and he stood rigid, as if half-frozen. The first thing I took from the wallet was that paper, and as I shook it open I looked at him and he was falling straight back, like a dummy would fall if tipped over. I think his head struck the knob of a drawer—one of those cabinets that have drawers clear to the floor. I did not notice at the time—not until I had lifted him.

"He weighed nothing. I moved him, but saw at once that he was dead. I believe he was dead before he fell. He had a weak heart anyway. I had laid him on his face to look at the cut.

"Then I read the paper and when I saw what it was I did not wonder that he had fainted or even died. I would have given it back to him. Yes, I would have given it back even if I had read it, which I would not have done if he had not been so agitated. But when I knew that he was dead I did not see any reason why the paper should not belong to me. It was evidently his wish to blackmail and torment the men whom he had served—making a 'clean breast,' he called it, when doing the most despicable thing possible for a lawyer. So I kept the paper. You know the rest."

Rawlison was a little nervous. He said that no jury would believe that. I said that I did not think a jury would ever have reason to express an opinion on the matter. He whistled long-drawn and softly, and inhaled deeply of his unpleasant cigaret; also he shook his head doubtfully.

"Funny," he said at last, "that girl showing up here. And she was there all the time. It looks like——"

He broke off. I asked what it looked like.

"Like—I can't think just how to say it. But like—all things considered, you know. Hartigan being your friend. She being Hartigan's daughter. It looks like—well, it makes me almost superstitious. I don't wonder *now* that you won't let Hazel and me use that paper. It's bad business to mix up graft with justice. I'd steal money from a sick preacher, but I don't want any of that!"

He was a big, robust, careless sort of fellow, but at that moment he was almost pathetically worried. He had put his finger on the right spot when he said it made him almost superstitious. I understood.

XIII

MANY things happened within the next few days of which it would be easy to take a great deal of time to tell about. But as I am not writing a love-story, I can quickly tell what happened to Rawlison. He went to Madame Guigane with the great idea of making it appear that he was very much in love with Nan, whom he had never seen; but he pretended to have known her by sight and to have observed her from a distance. Hazel took his words at about what they were worth. It was not easy to hoodwink her. But the odd part of the affair was that Rawlison, at the first glimpse he had of Nan, did lose his heart, head and whatever else a man can part with when made dizzy by love.

What sort of appeal he used with Hazel I do not know; but he reached that part of her heart which was sympathetic, and soon she was doing all of the kindnesses she could for the girl. Few girls were ever more in need of them than Nan, for something else

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happened which was worse for her than anything that had taken place before.

A prison outbreak occured at San Quentin. A dozen desperate characters got loose at night. Some were killed and some were caught at once. Three succeeded in hiding for two days, when all but one were retaken. One of the guards was missing too, but it was thought that he had been bribed to help the prison break and had ducked for fear his part in it had become known.

Tom Hartigan was the only one of the prisoners that had not been retaken. He was well known throughout the city, and there was much suspense and talk during the days when his pursuers were returning empty-handed. Almost every one wanted to have him get away; but a week later the bloated, defaced body of a man in convict garb was found adrift on the bay and the jubilant word went out from the prison that no prisoner had ever *successfully* escaped from San Quentin.

I was soon in an uncomfortable situation. In fact, I had overplayed my hand a little with Rankin and his crowd. They had been made very agitated by the message through Jance that the girl was trying to get publicity for some document she had got from Pollard's office. My intention had been to keep them worried. In a like manner, to have them worried and baffled, I had given Mr. Frederick Wallace the forged copy; and in about a week or ten days he sold it. I think he gave it up for one thousand dollars; and it was such a fine copy that Rankin and his friends—knowing, or thinking that they knew, how Wallace had got it—believed they had secured the damning paper. And on the supposition that I had been bested, hoodwinked, beaten, they started to make life lively for me. My teeth were supposed to have been pulled by Mr. Frederick Wallace. Instead of making them worry and feel troubled as I had planned, I had reversed the situation and made them feel secure.

Warrants were issued for me. I was charged with just about everything imaginable. They were going to make an example of me. The gambler Sandys came forward and told that I had quarreled with Pollard, and I was charged with being implicated in his death. I had overridden, bluffed, bullied and bought people long enough. Judge Rankin—he was lately retired from the bench—issued a statement; both the McFash brothers talked; the chief of police made some remarks. I had not expected any such aggressive move, and was in a way unprepared.

Jance tipped me off, so I did not stir from the apartment the whole of that day on which the warrants were issued. Rawlison was wanted too. We played cribbage, and when any one knocked on the door Rawlison would call out that there was nobody at home; so the officers knew that we had been tipped off, but they did not try to force the matter. They could afford to be patient. We would get hungry and have to come out. So a policeman sat on each side of our hall doorway, and two other policemen waited at the tradesman entrance. Rawlison talked good-naturedly with them, and treated it as a comedy. They in turn were good-natured. There was no possible chance for us to get away—unless we jumped from the window; and the windows were five stories up.

Rawlison succeeded in begging the policemen to slip pieces of the afternoon paper under the door; and the paper seemed agitated as to whether the trapped "gunmen" would make a fight for it.

Of course all that we were waiting for was night, a moonless night. Rawlison prayed for a fog and he got it. I doubt if there had ever been a heavier fog—at least it seemed so before I was through with it.

All kinds of people had telephoned, reporters and police officials explaining why we had better surrender, until Rawlison disconnected the wiring. The police tried to talk to us through the door, but I never went near it and Rawlison would not give serious answers to anything that was said. He was in high good humor, enjoying himself.

Once he returned from the door and said Judge Rankin was there and wanted to speak to me. I did not believe him. I don't think Rawlison himself believed it was Rankin. He was not the sort of man who would visit gunmen at bay.

Rawlison and I had a slight disagreement on what we should do. He wanted to stop off in Hazel's apartment. He said it would be safest and he was probably right; but had it been the most dangerous thing to do he would have wanted to do it just the same. He was really in love with Nan, wanted to remain near her—she was a fugitive too—

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and so tried to pretend that it was safe. Somehow a man when in love always imagines that he should be near the girl.

As I have mentioned before it was not by accident that the descent was in a direct line with a window of Hazel's apartment on the second floor.

It was about three o'clock in the morning, the quietest hour of night, when Rawlison shook out the coil of little rope and hung the ring on the hook.

"If there was only some way to get this rope off—they never could imagine how we got away," he said.

It was almost true, for the hook had been set well under the ledge so that one had to bend far over to see it. Jance of course might tell, but Jance had become very friendly.

I told him I did not think it wise for him to stop at Hazel's apartment. His friendship with her was known, and with the rope dangling in line with her window somebody might become suspicious. That made him thoughtful, but did not change his mind.

He went first, and wrapped his hands with cloth on which he sprinkled resin; and by counting the windows knew on which ledge to plant his feet while he tapped against the pane with his head; and presently I knew by the slack on the rope that he had been helped inside.

He had left the leather gloves for me to use, saying that I had farther to go. It was not with any particular sensation of joy that I wriggled feet-first across that ledge and, holding on with one hand, groped for the rope under me with the other. I kicked with my right foot until I had the rope coiled two or three times around my leg to prevent me from shooting downward, then let go of the ledge and put both hands on to the rope.

The resin that was on the gloves gave such a fast grip that the descent was easily made, and I paused a second or two as I passed the window from which came the whispers of two voices. Rawlison said "Good luck," but the other voice:

"Don't worry about us, and Don, for Heaven's sake be careful. Don't do anything crazy—please!"

That was Hazel's greeting and parting.

I got to the ground sooner than I expected, for gazing down in the fog was like looking down into a void, and I hit the asphalt with a sharp click. It sounded very loud to me, and instinctively I stood motionless, waiting.

"What was that?" said a voice not twenty feet away.

"—— this fog," came the answer.

Then silence. I knew both men were listening. I would even have to breathe with care.

Presently one said, "It was nothing," and the other began to whistle faintly, absent-mindedly, and I heard their steps. They were walking back and forth across the alley.

I do not know how long I waited. It was many minutes. Then one of the voices said:

"Aw, those birds haven't sheets an' blankets enough to make a rope. Let's go back an' get another drink."

The other voice said it wouldn't be wise for both of them to go together again. The sergeant might come around; and they fell to discussing the chances for Rawlison and me to put up a gunfight before we were caught.

"That Everhard's all bluff," said one. "You know what kind of a guy it'd be that'd take a name like that. Ever-*hard*, ——. He gets by because he knows how to look at a guy as if he was goin' eat 'im up."

The fog and darkness together was so thick that I could not see even my hand before my eyes; and though it gave me excellent concealment for the time, I was in some doubt as to how I was going to move about the streets when I got out of the alley. In a fog on a night like that even the soberest of men might get lost ten feet from his own doorstep.

"That Everhard," the same voice went on, "got his rep out of the newspapers. He never done nothin'—shot some drunks when they wasn't lookin'."

"Uh-huh," said the other, uninterested.

"He's just a tin-horn gambler what buys drinks for the reporters an' ——"

"That's me. I'm for a drink," said the other voice. "Comin'?"

"If the sergeant'd show up ——"

"If he does, you tell 'im I heard a noise an' went to see."

I heard feet moving off, and a voice followed—

"Bring a pint back with you."

BEING in a really thick fog leaves a man very little to depend on but luck; and though luck has always served me well it has probably been because I have not put much trust in anything so purely feminine.

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This was a heavy, wet grayish fog, almost like a drizzle; as the saying goes, it was thick as a wet blanket. And I, not being gifted with a sixth sense of direction, knew better than to make a bolt for it and go dashing off with a clatter of shoe-leather on the pavement—though it would have been a sort of blind man's bluff and might have amused the little gods that are supposed to view human affairs derisively.

I haven't many weaknesses. They are luxuries that a man who lives by what wits he has can not well afford; but I do not like to be talked of as that voice near-by had spoken of me. But I would not have gone much out of my way to correct him, for a man who turns aside and pauses to educate the foolish will not get very far. Yet it would be an added pleasure to enlighten him at the same time he was put to a profitable use.

It was cold and damp—more than damp; but I took off my shoes so there would be no unlucky clicking and slipping and thrust them into the side pockets of my lightweight overcoat; then, keeping a guiding hand along the building, I moved forward toward where from time to time I could hear his humming, yawning, scuffling of feet.

I went softly and crouching—crouching because policemen, like other people, always shoot high when startled and I had no way of knowing how nervous this fellow might be. I have known policemen to stand their lonely watches with a gun in hand and cocked. He had sounded as if he might be some such brave fellow.

Slowly, foot by foot, with the stealth of a burglar among watch-dogs, I came nearer. I was very close to him; but, peer hard as I could, I could see nothing; though I felt sure that I could touch him, since I could hear his breathing and the almost noiseless tapping of his fingers against his slicker. I have done a few things involving a little risk, but I never tried blindfolded to hold up a man; yet this seemed like nothing less. Yet I have found it well to remember that the other fellow is human, can't see through fog 'or darkness, doesn't want to get shot and will let his imagination play him tricks.

Then right in front of my eyes a blob of light appeared. It was as if he had suddenly broken a luminous egg; and I could have jerked the watch from his hand as he turned the eye of the flashlight on its face. The light went out.

"Oh," he said mutteringly, "ten o' four!"

"Yes," I answered, jamming a muzzle against his belly, "and up with your hands!"

He grunted, partly in fright and partly from the force of the muzzle against his belly. I could not see a thing, but I could feel, and before he had the least chance to recover himself I had thrust my hand in under his coat and lifted the gun from his holster.

I told him not to try to grab me unless he thought I had a wooden gun; and to keep his arms high for if they began to sag I might mistake his intentions. Then I turned his face to the wall and, reaching an almost embracing arm around, fumbled for his badge and took the flashlight from his pocket. In his hip pocket I found a pair of handcuffs, and I pulled first one and then the other of his arms down and handcuffed them behind him. His curses were something fearful until I asked him to stop, explaining that I never used them myself.

Then, pretending to be speaking to some one near, I said that it was all safe; but that we had better make the policeman go along with us for a time so that he couldn't give the alarm. And I knew that he would be ready to swear by his life that he had been assaulted by at least two men, probably he would say three or four.

But before we moved I heard the fumbling footsteps of somebody making his way through the fog; and an inquiring voice called:

"Canning? Where the devil are you? This —— fog's getting worse."

I said to answer him, to tell him the sergeant had been around and wanted him to call headquarters at once; and "Do it as though you meant it," I whispered.

He had a heavy, husky voice and called nervously—

"Hey, Sam——"

"Louder," I told him, for he spoke as if to some one half-way across a small room.

"Sam, the sergeant's been around—" he was shouting.

This wouldn't do, so I had to say—

"Not so loud."

The result was that the approaching Sam, fumblingly stumbling along with the edge of the sidewalk for a guide, did not know what was the matter and wondered. He came nearer and nearer, so that I was no better off than I had been.

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"Where are you?" said Sam, and I had to prod Canning to make him answer, "Here." I did not dare whisper again.

"What's the matter? You sound funny."

"The sergeant—" Canning began.

"Is down there in the saloon. I didn't dare go in. He's not a bad fellow, but—give me a match."

Sam's hand fumbled gropingly against Canning.

"I haven't a match," said Canning uneasily.

"So I see," said the other, running his hand down my extended arm and taking the two or three matches I offered. "What's the matter with you, anyway? You act funny."

The one called Sam was lighting his cigar when I thrust the gun into his face with the command, "Hands up!"

Perhaps he caught a shadow-like glimpse of the gun in the tiny flare of the match, but anyway he knew by the tone that the drop was on him; yet, knocking up the gun, he was on to me and yelling for help. I know that he had not paused to think of anything. He simply jumped, and the only reason that I did not shoot was because I would not dangerously injure a man who was doing his duty. I was not an assassin. He got a good grip on my arm, and I jerked hard so that he slipped and fell but he did not let go and I came down too.

Had we been blindfolded we could not have been much more in the dark, for it was a moonless, foggy night at the entrance of an unlighted alley. I am strong and quick, but this fellow was like a bulldog; and he yelled in a way that would have awakened a graveyard. We rolled over and over, pulling and squeezing and jerking.

He was heavy, strong, determined, and I had caught a Tatar. I could not stay to be caught like a rat in a trap, for already windows were being thrown up and people were shouting. He had a hold on my overcoat that could not have been broken by the pull of a mule, so I swiftly slipped out of it—and stood still.

It was no use to run. I did not know north from south and would probably have bumped against a building. But he did not stand still. He jumped up, shouted and began to shoot in the air. Women who had their heads to windows screamed, voices yelled. There was a clatter of feet, stumbling, curses. The fog was cursed. Cries were flung about to know what had happened; and rumors were born in a minute and went flying from mouth to mouth.

It did not seem to occur to anybody that I could not see or move better in the fog than any one else. They all took it for granted that I had fled, and the dense blackness was cursed with feeling.

My feet were cold. I wished for my shoes back. I was bare-headed. I had dropped my gun and lost the one that was taken from Canning. I still had one in a shoulder holster, but there did not seem much chance for it to do me any good. Cries to know what had happened were answered imaginatively, and people were all about. It was a hurly-burly of sightless men. Flashlights were blunted by the fog so that they struck no distance at all into the darkness. A man blundered into me and I told him gruffly, as any policeman could have done, to be careful where he was going, so he must have thought that I was one of the force.

Voices cried down from overhead that our apartment had been broken into. No one knew how we had escaped. But we had escaped. We were gone. Somebody from afar up jeered the police. Probably it was a romantic serving-maid in one of the rich apartments. And the fog was cursed. Nothing could be done in such a fog.

"Them birds certainly was lucky," seemed the sentiment of the officers.

My feet were half-frozen and I stood almost within arm's reach of the invisible man who said it.

The one who had fought with me was repeating his story interminably; but Canning was having little to say and his plight had not been discovered.

I was not comfortable of mind, but I was not worried. Most of the mistakes that men make are through impatience. I am never impatient; and I have been called lucky because I take my time, watch chances and do not get excited. Never. I try to do the natural and logical thing, and when I don't do it I usually get into a mess.

THERE was only one place that I could go in a blinding fog like this with any degree of certainty. Anything else I tried to do must be haphazard. I was cold. I needed shoes. I needed a hat and overcoat; and the risks that would be run in getting back to my apartment where I was certain to find those things,

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being known and expected, could be taken care of much better than those that would come from blindly tramping and blundering around.

Besides, now that I was known to have escaped from the apartment I would not be expected to return to it, the guards—if any remained—would not be alert; and I have found that whenever I can do something really surprizing that I have about ninety per cent. of the advantage.

It was out of the question to try to go in the front way and probably as useless to hope to creep undetected up the back, but I knew there was a passage up from the basement that opened near the elevator. The basement windows, of course, were protected by grilling and it would be the next thing to impossible for me to break through them.

But I had heard the janitor's voice excitedly talking through the fog, explaining who he was, telling what he thought. Like other people, he had been alarmed by the shots; and he had jumped out into the fog before he realized its density. I was confident that he had not stopped to lock the door behind him.

It was with more trouble than I shall take the time to explain that I finally worked my way to the rear of the Saxon Arms, and by prowling and fumbling for I don't know how long, I came upon the unlocked door; and I went through it. The relief of getting out of a fog into natural darkness, penetrable by a light, was almost as if I had got into safe comforts at a remote distance from policemen. I crossed to the stairs and went to the door that opened into the hallway above. It had a catch lock to keep people from descending. I opened the door and peeped out. The hall was practically empty. I had thought that it would be full of people.

I waited until the elevator came down, then stepped inside, closed the door and pulled the lever before the Chinese pilot knew what was happening; and we were shooting up.

"Five," I told him.

It stopped and he opened the door.

"Out you come too," I said.

He looked up at me with nebulous, innocent eyes and started to say something; but didn't. He came out without a murmur.

I pulled the lever, closed the door, and sent the elevator pilotless on its way down; and in a few moments it struck the bumpers with a mighty jar, vibrating the whole house and frightening people. The Saxon Arms was in a fair way to lose a lot of its reputation as a quiet, reputable place.

The door of my apartment was not closed. It had been broken into—the lock forced. I pushed it open, and no one was in sight; but I could hear voices. I indicated to the Chinese boy that he was to go ahead, but he had no wish for that position and whispered that he was my "flen'."

There was no time to argue and I did not dare delay. I took him gently by the collar and pushed him along quietly into the next room where two policemen in uniform were sitting comfortably with a box of Rawlison's cigars and two bottles of his wine by them. I knew at once that there were no other policemen in the apartment. They wouldn't have been absent from the room. Not with cigars and wine opened.

"Put them up, quick!" I said before they knew what was taking place.

Their hands went up.

I said to keep them up and face the wall; then I removed their guns. also their stars; and because one was a rather tall, slender fellow I had a very good idea. I made the Chinese boy help him out of coat and trousers. The whole thing took but a few minutes; and if they had not been sprawled in comfort, and so close together that one gun's muzzle served to cover both at the same time, I might have had to use a lttle more resourcefulness in getting them disarmed and helpless.

I found a pair of handcuffs on each of them and locked them together, hands behind and back to back, after which on promise of prying open the jaws with a knife-blade if they were stubborn, I got their mouths open and stuffed the best part of a pillow slip into each. Then as much to protect him from suspicion of being a confederate as to keep him from giving an alarm, I trussed and gagged the Chinese boy.

I put on dry socks, a good pair of shoes and, stuffing a cap into my pocket, proceeded to try to slip the stripped policeman's trousers and coat on over mine; but the idea was a failure. The best I could do was to wear his slicker, and by folding paper in the sweatband of his cap I could keep it on my head without having it blindfold me. I pinned the star on the outside of the slicker as I remembered having seen some

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badges worn, and took a glance at myself in the mirror.

It was about as near to a disguise as anything that I had ever put on, and I was surprized at the difference that it made. I would hardly have known myself—might have wondered where I had met that fellow, but could hardly have guessed who it was. That was largely because I had taken on resemblance to a policeman, about the last thing in the world I had any wish to resemble.

I went into the hall and down the stairs. The noise and jar made by the elevator had turned people out. Some thought there had been an explosion. On my way down I was repeatedly asked, "Officer, what is the matter?" The halls were full of curl-papers and bare ankles, of men with unwashed faces and frogged pajamas; and there was much squealing and chattering.

On the first floor there was a crowd about the elevator, which had slipped a cable or something, and could not be moved; and people were guessing how it had got away from the pilot. And there was a policeman or two and a detective who had opened the door and were staring and poking about in the cage that had struck and stuck three or four feet below the floor. I saw Hazel moving about with a strained, preoccupied air, and I started to go up to her, but I stopped abruptly for I had come almost face to face with Judge Douglas Rankin.

I simply had to know what he was doing there. He was with Detective-Sergeant Reynolds, whose eyes were probably the most dangerous of any in the hall. Rankin had an insolent way of not looking at whomever he spoke to, or of looking at the speaker when he was addressed. People who can afford to hire flunkeys often cultivate that insolence. Reynolds, however, was looking attentively at Rankin so that he did not catch sight of me. Reynolds not only knew me, but knew every policeman; so certainly I did not care to undergo his scrutiny.

I approached behind and turned my back to listen, but they seemed to be talking only of how Rawlison and I had escaped; and I could not stand by, listening, very long without attracting attention. I located Hazel again and moved so as to come close to her. Her face was very strained.

"What is there to be worried over?" I asked.

She recognized my voice before she saw my face, and was startled.

As she looked at me she spoke with a labored effort at being causal, for there were many people about; but her eyes showed wonder and fear.

"The fog," I said. "It is impossible to move about." Then, lowering my voice, "Why is Rankin here?"

"Oh," she said quickly, "why didn't you talk with him last night? He came here all nervous—as if he was afraid. He's been here ever since. But you—you must go—find that fellow. Those fellows," she added loudly, and speaking for the ears that seemed gaping near us.

It was pleasant to know that fear had got hold of Rankin's heart; but I did not have time to imagine why before Hazel, as if unwilling to trust herself any longer, hurried away.

Rawlison had not acted wisely in refusing to hold a conversation with anybody; but naturally both of us had supposed somebody was going to try to cajole us into a surrender. And I would just about as soon—or a little rather—have listened to a proposition from the devil as one from Judge Rankin. But I was not long in guessing what was the matter with his honor. It was easy to guess for there was but one thing and one only that would have worked such a change; and that was this: He had discovered that the document he had purchased from my burglarious caller was a forgery.

Rankin probably imagined that the document had been stolen, so to speak, in good faith; and that Rawlison and I did not know it was a forgery—but he could not be sure, and he knew that there must be somewhere an original of that document. The facts it contained were too authentic. If Rawlison and I had had the original—well, Judge Rankin and his friends felt that they had something to worry over. I rather felt so myself—though if I should be clapped into jail and kept from communication with friends, Rankin would have much less to worry over, and knew it.

That was the line of thought running rapidly through my head when I felt an arm on my shoulder, and as I yielded to the pressure and turned Sergeant Reynolds said—

"Go up-stairs an'——"

He got no farther. As I caught the light of recognition in his eyes I swung the

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revolver against his head, knocking him unconscious. Some way or other I would have to make it up to him later; but I had no time to parley or explain.

Women screamed and men shouted, and people jumped about excitedly before they knew what was up. I shot twice at the ceiling just to make the crowd more agitated; and because I looked something like a policeman—Reynolds had not been given a chance to speak—nobody really guessed what was up until I was almost to the front door, when Rankin suddenly recognized me and cried:

"Everhard! That's him!"

A most ungrammatical thing for his honor to say; but it had a very different effect than might have been expected, for instead of a rush to seize and overpower me, there was a backward rush the other way. People fell away, and the only cries of "Halt!" were from two voices back in the crowd.

Somebody shot at me from the stairway, and another revolver opened fire from the edge of some frightened men and women who instantly scrambled from near the officer. At that moment I would probably have shot Rankin, for right then I felt very strongly that he had no use on earth; but he had frantically ducked from sight.

I don't want any one to think I am trying to make believe that I stood there coolly looking the situation over, then with disdainful dignity withdrew through the front door. Nothing of the kind. I withdrew with a degree of alacrity. I went out backward, but I went rapidly; and I stumbled rapidly down the front stairs and into the sheltering gray folds of the fog.

It was not so dismally black as it had been, but it was almost as impenetrable. Somewhere at the edge of the world dawn was trying to climb up, but at that one could not see more than five or six feet and then only the vague shape of bulky objects. There was a noisy pack of people pouring out of the doorway.

This time it looked as if I would really have to make a run for it; and a run in a fog is just about as unpleasant and haphazard as one imagines it to be. But I am not easily rattled and leave as few things to chance as possible; so I stepped into the gutter and crouching so that my hand touched the edge of the sidewalk, I was prepared to trot along in as straight a line as if I had use of my eyes. But I had gone only a few steps when I nearly ran my head into the rear of a limousine.

I scarcely paused, but, stepping on to the bumper, scrambled rapidly to the top of the car and lay flat while all about me came the feet and voices of pursuers, some shouting that I had gone one way, some saying another; and once the limousine door was opened and a flashlight turned inside.

"Not there," said the voice. "Been just like him, though."

I lay there for perhaps an hour or nearly that, until the fog thinned enough for me to see dimly the outlines of doorways in buildings across the street, out of which people were beginning to stir drowsily; and I was thinking of sliding down and going on my way when two people approached and I could not risk trying to peek over to take a look at them for they stopped beside the car.

"I think we can make it now, sir," one of them said. "It is clearing a bit. I can get home very well now, sir."

The next thing I knew the door was being opened and closed, the chauffeur was on the seat, and we were creeping slowly up the slippery street, while I lay as flat as possible.

So it was that the Honorable Douglas Rankin carried me safely through the outflung cordons of cops that were searching high and low through the neighborhood.

XIV

IT WAS, of course, as the saying goes, an unexpected pleasure to be driven home by Judge Rankin, whom I had intended visiting anyhow very shortly, but I did not feel like making the whole of the ride perched on top of the limousine. People who have never been on top of a limousine have no idea how conspicuous it is; and though it was early in the morning when the streets were almost deserted, though there was fog enough to dim the eyesight, and though the man in the street is the least observant of animals, I was not quite satisfied with my position. One halloo at me and I would have been forced to run like a rabbit; and I do not like to run like a rabbit.

The car was going very slowly, partly because of the wet street and partly to avoid any object that might crazily rush down upon it from the fog. I crawled backward as stealthily as I could and waited

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until the machine dipped into a depression at a street-crossing so that my movement in getting down would be taken as a part of the jar. I succeeded in getting off without arousing anybody's attention. Judge Rankin, inside, was probably pretty much absorbed with his own thoughts; but when I jerked open the door and thrust myself inside he came out of his meditations with a start that nearly sent him against the top of the car.

I have seen a few men frightened, and he was as much so as any that I have ever seen; for though he did not make an outcry—the extended gun kept him quiet—he gasped and his face was distorted like that of a man who fights with a nightmare. It must have seemed to him that I had come from revenge; and as he had no way of guessing how I managed to be there, the mystery of it increased his uneasiness—if a man who fears for his life anyway can be said to have his uneasiness increased.

Rankin was a rather tall, lean man, with a face full of lines and sagging muscles. From a long judicial training he had developed a dignity of manner that would have been impertinent in a czar; and he carried himself as one aloof and apart; he never smiled, never was known to jest, and had no more humor or kindness in him than a snap-turtle. I don't know whether by nature he was a coward or not, for certainly he had no fear of God and very little respect for the devil. His eyes were dark as burned-out coals and looked at people from corners in that furtive, critical, suspicious way that is more or less deliberately calculated to make people feel embarrassed.

I refuse to feel embarrassed for anybody; and besides, he did not look at me from the corners of his eyes, but stared wide-eyed and direct. Also he sat up and paid close attention when I spoke to him, which is something that he probably had not done for any man other than a social equal for a dozen years. It was said that he used to look absent-mindedly from the window even while sentencing people to be hanged; but I do not believe that, for I am sure he enjoyed seeing their terror and hopelessness too much to keep his eyes elsewhere than on their faces.

"Good morning, judge," I said with a little forced familiarity as I settled into the seat across from him, having first closed the trap so the chauffeur would not hear.

He sat back stiff and straight and staring as if I were moving a snake's head nearer and nearer to his face.

"Now just what was it you wanted last night? You seemed so persistent that I thought I would ask you. Why don't you say something?"

It was probably because the muscles of his throat would not move. He put a hand to his collar, pulled and tugged as if easing a tightened band. I waited. I was in no hurry. There was not a safer place in the city for me than inside of Judge Rankin's limousine.

"Wha—what do you want?"

His voice was thick and husky. It seemed pretty much of an effort for him to talk. He moistened his lips, and the muscles under his right eye twitched. There was no movement on the left side of his face at all, but the right cheek quivered.

I told him that there were many things that I wanted. One of them was to find out just about how many forged copies of the Pollard document he would be willing to buy; for, I said, the funds from such sales might be used to relieve broken-down burglars.

That was, I thought, as good a way as any to let him know that I guessed he had bought the forgery under the impression that it was the original.

He said nothing. Probably his throat muscles were still numbed.

I went on to tell that I was also interested in knowing just how he was going to call off the hunt for me, for—

"You are going to call it off, aren't you?" I said.

He swallowed hard and made some grimaces. The fellow was almost paralyzed either with fear or the excitement of the thing.

"You should have known," I told him, "that out of self-respect I would never have let the police arrest me. How would you feel to have some great raw-boned, flat-footed creature clawing at your shoulder?"

Of course I was not so serious as I seemed to be; but I was more in earnest than people are likely to suspect if they think I ever waste my time in jokes.

"You have the original?" he asked.

That was the thing of importance to him, and it well might be. There were honest men of influence in San Francisco, men who hated him and his crowd, and who would

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be glad to make a public use of the Pollard revelations; and he had no way of knowing that I would not give it into their hands.

I told him that certainly I had the original.

"You—you will sell?"

"Sell? No, not sell. That would be blackmail. I shall ask you to do certain things which you know ought to be done, and then as a reward—as a little token of my appreciation I shall present you with the confession of the unfortunate Mr. Pollard."

The car went slowly, smoothly on through the cool, gray, mist-like draperies. We both sat stiff and watchfully intent. The lines in his sagging face seemed to have deepened themselves, and his yellow face was more bloodless than ever. To the right of his long nose the twitching of the cheek continued, though otherwise he sat without a movement. His eyes were set straight at me, and so much had dignity become a part of himself that he had the immobile stiffness and reserve of carved stone. His flesh was about as warm as flint.

"How did you get it?"

I could scarcely hear the words; they were almost whispered. Perhaps the voice was intentionally lowered for a confidential effect. Perhaps that was as loud as he could speak. I do not know.

I said that Pollard had given it to me with his own hands.

He did not believe me; but I could not help that.

He asked what I expected. What I intended to do.

I don't know why it is, but I never seem to have any better ideas and plans by thinking the matter over for a long time than I get by taking the first thoughts that pop into my head; and as he asked what I intended to do, then and there it occurred to me that the best thing I could do was not to let him get out of my sight until we had come to a definite understanding.

So, without having thought of the thing before, I said that I intended to accompany him home and to stay near him, by him, as I could not imagine any other place that would give me the same security from the numerous police circulating through the streets and inquiring among all the places where I might be supposed to stop.

There was nothing so very bold about that plan; and not nearly so much danger as may seem at first glimpse. Rankin was thoroughly frightened; perhaps less by what might be done with the Pollard statement than by what I might do, for he was one of those people who thought that I would as soon shoot any man as look at him. Which is not true. It depends on the man.

If he had known it he might have been relieved: I was beginning to value his life very highly and did not want anything to happen to him. I began to see how I could use him as I could not have used any of the others of his crowd; first because I had, in a way, the psychological drop on him in view of the fact that we were old enemies; and secondly because there was none of the group that thought so much of his reputation and standing in the community as Judge Douglas Rankin thought of his. Therefore he would be more likely to make any needed sacrifices to get the paper with old Pollard's signature on it reduced to ashes.

I never had a chance to find out what the chauffeur thought as he opened the door and two people stepped from the car. I did not even glance at him; but I took it for granted that he would think I was a real policeman and not the fugitive. It was simply impossible for him to think otherwise for he had heard nothing and saw no sign of menace against his employer. He doesn't know yet how I came to be in the limousine.

Rankin was a widower living in a sort of stately grandeur in a large stone house on the hill. He opened the door himself and went in hurriedly, and I followed. He crossed the hall and at the foot of the stairs stopped and, speaking without looking at me, as was his manner, said:

"You can't come up to my room. Wait here below."

I told him, not in those words but in others not quite so crude, that the only way he could get out of my sight was to be buried. That brought him up with something of a jerk. And right on his heels I accompanied him up the stairs and into his bedroom.

XV

IT WOULD perhaps be tedious to go into details of how we went through the day. I did not interfere with Judge Rankin's affairs much beyond keeping him a prisoner, not letting

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him out of my sight or giving him the chance to speak a word that I did not hear.

Over and over he said impatiently:

"This is preposterous! I won't tolerate it!"

But each time he took a moment for reflection and lapsed into a state of quiet anger. It was preposterous, of course. The idea of a professional gambler, a fellow for whom the police were searching—the very idea of his being sheltered by so eminent a personage as Judge Douglas Rankin, particularly when Judge Douglas Rankin did not want to do the sheltering.

First thing, he had said that he was going to retire. I could not, of course, remain in his bedroom. He was tired. He needed the rest. I said that I would sit by his bedside and keep quiet. He was furious. I don't know whether he slept or not, but I fancy that he lay still with his eyes closed, trying to think what it would be best to do with me. I was sleepy and I dozed in a chair moved so that the door could not be opened.

I sleep about as lightly as a cat at a mouse-hole; and when, from under my eyelids, I saw the dignified Judge Rankin—in pajamas—stealthily creeping from his bed toward the window I was almost tempted to let him venture out on the ivy vine; but if he should have fallen and broken his neck I would have been without a very important, not friend exactly, but certainly assistant.

And I explained all that to him as he started to unsnap the screen.

So it went, with one little thing after another; and what could he do to help himself? Nothing. Not a thing. Audacious, if not impossible, as the situation may seem, it was really very simple; for though Judge Rankin had servants about him, talked with them, was served by them, though he telephoned about business to friends, yet he was helpless because he believed that I would shoot. He felt that I was dangerous, deadly; he knew that I was his enemy. He was afraid; and he knew that I was watching him every moment. Even when I was looking from the window or turning the pages of a book, he knew that I was really intent on him and his movements.

He soon tried the manner of ignoring my presence, of not looking at me or speaking, of pretending that he did not know I was around, of walking from room to room without paying the least attention to my following; but I told him it was uncivil to treat a guest in such a manner, and though it made him angry it also made him see that I had no intention of being treated as one of his servants.

Along in the middle of the afternoon we were in the library. He was writing letters. Already he had found that I had no objections to the number of letters that he wrote—but I would not permit them to be mailed or handed to any one for delivery. That was also preposterous—but his honor found it true, nevertheless. Anyway, he was writing; and I was meditating on certain ideas and plans that seemed to fit in with the situation, when there was the sound of angry voices in the hall.

The butler had instructions to admit no one—at least not until evening.

We could hear his complaining protests; but the intruder had forced himself into the hallway and his voice declared:

"By——, I will see him—and now. Get from me!"

"But, sir, Judge Rankin——"

"Take your hands off me. He's here. I've got to see him. I've waited all day!"

Rankin had a dread of cranks. He was the most inaccessible sort of person anyway; probably because he did not want to meet some of those people he had sentenced. At the noise of the voices in the hall he jumped up from his desk and looked at me, but he did not say anything. Oddly enough there was a sort of appeal in his expression as he faced me. He did not appear to be frightened, but rather intensely annoyed; and he looked as if for the moment he had forgotten our respective parts. It would be wrong to think that there was anything friendly in his attitude. Not at all. But his manner seemed to say—

"What are *you* going to do about this?"

I did not want intruders any more than he wanted them. But as the butler did not seem able to keep the fellow out, it appeared that I would have to do something. Of course I had discarded the slicker and policeman's cap; but I had a collection of police badges in my pocket, and I pinned one on my vest. Then I told Rankin to sit where he was and not even try to move.

The library, a very large room of alcoves and curtains, dark and sepulchral, opened through wide folding-doors into the baronial hall; and from the doorway I could keep an

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eye on the desk at which Rankin sat. There was not much chance of his trying to get away.

I went in to the hallway, where the butler was half-pleading with the intruder. This fellow's back was toward me; and by the butler's manner I knew he was a stranger to him. He was a rather husky, broad-shouldered fellow, roughly dressed; and I clapped a hand on his shoulder, jerking him around as I said—

"Look here!"

And as I said it I pointed to the exposed police badge on my vest.

The man wheeled.

He saw the badge before he saw my face and his gun was fairly jammed against my stomach. I scarcely know how it was that both of us were not killed then and there, shot by each other; for, even quick as he was, I had been quicker and if I had been looking at anything except his bearded face I would have shot on the instant I sensed—rather than saw—his gun-gesture. I probably was never so near to death, and I have touched its finger-tips a time or two.

For a moment we stared as men stare who have met the dead, for the puzzling resemblance I had seen through his beard had become an actual recognition; and I was the last person he ever expected to find in a Rankin house.

He stepped back, incredulous, and did not say anything, but he put his bright nickel-plated gun into his pocket; and I too had nothing to say, for an idea had come.

I told the butler to go away, that it was all right; there had been a mistake, because this gentleman was expected.

Then I pointed through the open doorway of the library, and the stranger, after a questioning glance, went inside. I closed the doors and locked them.

The gun-play and all had taken place in the hall out of sight of Rankin where he sat at his desk. He knew nothing of that. He had heard nothing except what I had said to the butler.

I find that events, the things that happen to you, are like cards, and you must play them as they fall to you. The wisest man in the world can't plan what is going to happen for twenty-four hours ahead; but anybody of a little wit and daring can make the most of each situation as it develops.

So I marched right down the library to Rankin and said to him:

"Here is the person I have been waiting for. He is a few minutes late, but——"

Rankin stood up, stared; then he sat down weakly, staring, almost gasping. He shuddered and the right cheek began to quiver on a face that seemed otherwise dead.

Tom Hartigan was before him once more.

XVI

THE coming of Hartigan changed the situation a little. In terms of the green table, it strengthened my hand. I felt that our affairs should be wound up quickly.

I had no time then to question Hartigan and did not get his story until long afterward. Some day it may be worth telling in detail. He had not miraculously come back from the grave—he had simply changed clothes with the guard. The guard had been bribed to have a boat hidden on the beach as well as to let the convicts go past his post. They carried him along in the break so as to lose less time by making him point out the boat—but there wasn't any. He had taken the money they had scraped together through their friends on the outside and double-crossed them.

They gambled for his clothes and Hartigan won.

He had had a hard time in getting off the point and had at last got into the city only to learn that his daughter—who was far more to him than his life—was being hunted for murder; and the papers lately had been making it plain that I, too, was into trouble. He knew Rankin's tremendous influence on the men who controlled the police affairs, and he had come determined to get some satisfaction out of Rankin or to kill him.

"No," I said, as Hartigan glared down murderously, "no, don't hurt him—not yet anyway. Let us give him a chance."

Hartigan made a low animal sound, a low *gr-r-r-r*, that said he would like to strangle Rankin, strangle him slowly just for the sheer pleasure of seeing him struggle.

Hartigan was changed a great deal. He was a big fellow, but no longer genial, pleasant. The kindliness in his face was gone, and behind the rough short beard there was a set, desperate expression, and his eyes had the look of a man who is past caring what he does. Most prisons are wonderful places for making men like that.

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Rankin stammeringly asked what we wanted, what he could do.

I told him to take the telephone and use it as I directed. It took some time to locate the McFash brothers, Watson and Tuerny; but at last they were found, and they must have wondered a great deal at Rankin's voice and insistence as he asked each of them to be at his house at nine that evening.

Then I used the telephone and got hold of Jance. I asked him to call at the general delivery for a letter addressed to T. M. Barnes; and when he got the letter to open it and take out the key, which was to P. O. Box 361a. He was to open this box and remove the envelope he would find there, then bring it to the home of Judge Douglas Rankin.

He listened patiently, or rather eagerly, then threw at me enough questions to have filled a book. The natural-born reporter seems able to explode questions. I asked him to do as I had said, then he could put his question. I was taking no risk in trusting; for besides knowing him to be an unusual boy, almost any reporter will faithfully do almost anything to get what is called the "inside dope."

And as it grew along toward evening I wrote a letter, a rather long letter, and I requested Judge Rankin to hand it to his chauffeur—in my presence—with instructions to present it to Madame Hazel Guigane of the Saxon Arms, after which he was to place himself and the car at the disposal of that lady.

Hartigan, knowing nothing of what was going on, sat in a stiff-backed chair in the shadows and glared.

XVII

THE library was ornamented with candles, and I lighted them; by having candles and sticks brought from other parts of the house I had enough to do with. I don't know how odd it may have seemed to the servants to see their master guarded every moment, but my police badge helped to make them think it was all right and that I was protecting Judge Rankin.

The coming of Hartigan had been a severe shock to him, and he had lapsed into a sort of apathetic dumbness. The look in Hartigan's eyes told that he had come to do murder; and some of the anxiety and despairing terror that Judge Rankin had often forced upon men by his sentences of death had struck into his own heart. He sat silent and rigid, waiting with eyes downcast and his hands resting motionless on the arms of the chair.

The McFash brothers were the first to arrive. They were called twins, whether as a fact or in jest I do not know. They were short fleshy men with full faces, cropped hair and a jovial enjoyment of life such as men might well have who had things pretty much their own way. One was a Democrat and the other a Republican, each a heavy contributor and hearty worker for the party cause; so between them they were never without influence in the City Hall. They had a knack of making money, of taking it wherever there chanced to be an opportunity for graft or a turn-over; they were bold and ruthless, as successful business men usually are—or usually think they are.

They came in with a hearty bluster of—

"Well, judge, what's the matter—you sounded funny!"

And Judge Rankin, who had not stirred from his chair to greet them as they were shown through the door by the butler, raised a long, lean arm and pointed with weary dignity at a shadowed spot some few paces before his chair where I was standing; and the McFashes turned and stared.

Not a word was spoken for some moments, then the fatter of the brothers, the Democrat, I think, said to Rankin—

"I say, judge, how'd you catch him?"

Rankin did not answer. He looked at the fellow and then away as if words would be wasted against such stupidity.

I asked them please to be seated, saying there were two or three other parties expected before we could take up a little matter which I thought they would appreciate having brought to their attention.

"Look here, what you tryin' to give us?"

The remark came from the other McFash, who seemed a bit more of the bully and needed something emphatic said to him.

I told him that I was neither a candidate for office, a judge nor any other sort of servant.

"Oh, sit down, Mack. Sit down and keep still," said Judge Rankin in a tired voice, wearily. "He has the Pollard statement—the original. And Hartigan is here."

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Both the McFashes almost collapsed. It was like a blow over the head, a hard one.

"It can't be!" one cried.

"He's dead!" said the other.

"No, gentlemen, merely asleep," I told them.

One grunted heavily and dropped into a chair; the other said, "Ow!" puffingly two or three times and let himself slide easily into a deep leather affair, whence he looked at me with mouth agape.

The next to arrive was Samuel W. Watson, down in the directory as a capitalist. In previous directories he had been listed as a contractor; but as near as I could judge he was a high-handed swindler who contributed heavily to charity, gave dinners to newsboys, bought stained-glass memorial windows for churches, willingly donated to any good cause that was likely to get his name in the paper. He was a fellow who had forcibly acquired fine manners, dressed in what he was told was the style, and liked to be conspicuous.

"Well, well," he said as he came in. "A Quaker meeting? My word, why so solemn? Somebody must have told a sad story, as both the Mac boys seem on the verge of tears. How are you, judge? Candles, eh? Pretty effect—ver—I say—what—who— Everhard!"

His eyes in wandering about at the pretty effect had fallen upon me, and the pretty effect was forgotten. He knew the feud that I carried with Rankin; he knew that Rankin and the McFash brothers had stirred up the pursuit against me; he knew my bad name and he was terror-stricken.

"An' Hartigan's here," somebody mumbled.

"Hartigan!"

I have often thought that the gestures of surprize and fear used by actors were exaggerated; but Watson stepped back with both hands lifted as if to press against his ears and shut out the word he had heard.

"Great ——! What does he want?" Watson asked tremblingly.

I suggested that he be seated and have a little patience; that he would learn in plenty of time to acquiesce in all the demands that would be made on him.

So Watson sat down and put his head between his hands.

Then Tuerny came. He was a big fellow and quite monstrously fat, coarse-grained and genial. His voice rumbled. He waddled when he walked, and attached to his watch-chain was some kind of semi-precious stone, big as a pillow, that beat against his protuberant belly when he moved. Tuerny was an inscrutable sort of fellow, popularly supposed to be the worst man in town, and he was cynically indifferent to what was thought of him. He liked wine, women, and horses; and probably had the least money, as he certainly made the biggest display of spending, of any in the group.

He came into the library with slow, heavy step, peered about and demanded to know what in —— was the matter.

"What's the idea of the candles? Hallowe'en party? What's the matter? You all look sort o' sick. Been eatin' shell-fish or something? Can't anybody talk? What's the matter, Sam?"

"Look over there," Watson mumbled sadly.

"Oh," said Tuerny, and he turned and faced me.

It was a few seconds before he recognized me, then he laughed, chuckling deeply, shaking himself, but he was not particularly merry.

"What'd I tell you fellows, eh? What'd I tell you? I said you'd wake up some night and find Everhard at the foot of your bed—an' that he wouldn't go away when you took a dyspepsia tablet, either. You fellows," he went on with a rubbing-it-in tone, "spend too much time at church gettin' whitewash on you. I've knocked about among the people that 've given this man his reputation, and they don't give a man anything he hasn't got coming to him. An' I expected something like this. I expected it. Judge, you had to issue a statement like you was running for office. And you boys"—the McFashes—"shot off your mouths too."

"Shut up," said one of the McFashes. "He's got the Pollard statement."

Tuerny whistled, then grunted in a kind of unmirthful chuckle, as if the joke was on him.

"That burglar was a crook, eh? Giped you with a forgery? If I remember right, Everhard sent word right off the bat that he had it. Down on the Coast they say you can count on whatever he tells you. And you might have known no footpad was going to steal something from him that he didn't want stolen. Not a footpad

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picked out by any of the McFash brothers' police anyhow. They never get close enough to a good crook to know what he looks like."

Some one told him that Hartigan was here.

"What! What?" And after a few moments he repeated, "What?"

"Hartigan—he's here, now."

"*U-r-r,*" said Tuerny. "It's the night before the Judgment Dawn. No wonder you feel sick. You and me are a bunch of wolves. What's that motto of yours, Sam? 'Anything's right if you know how to do it smoothly.' Now *do* something, old-timer. Let's see how smooth you are. Hartigan was a —— good shot in his early days. But, by ——, for my part I'm glad Tom Hartigan got away clear. San Quentin's a —— of a place for gentlemen. Did you ever think of that, judge?"

It was plain enough to me that Tuerny was more than half-enjoying the situation. He was not only the most generous and cynical of them, but had the frank man's contempt for the hypocrite.

"All right, now let's open our mouths and take our medicine. What's it to be, Everhard? You've got us where the wool's short."

But at that moment Jance came in. He was a little puzzled by the presence of five such important citizens and did not like to ask questions; but by the light in his eyes as he handed me the envelope I could see that he was bursting for news.

I gave it to him.

"Jance," I said loud enough to be heard by all, "the doctors have held an autopsy and come to the positive conclusion that Pollard came to his death through heart failure. The position and nature of the wound on the head leaves no doubt of its accidental character."

Like a flash Jance had his note-book out and asked for the names of the doctors performing the autopsy.

With a gesture I referred him to Tuerny.

"Jance, of the *Examiner*," I said. "Will you give him the name of the doctors——"

"It can't be done!" Watson moaned. "He's been dead two weeks."

"Shut up, Sam," said one of the McFash brothers.

"My boy," said Tuerny with a paternal hand on Jance's arm, "now nobody is going to get this story but you. But we're busy right now—private conference. Supposing I phone the names of the doctors in to you later. I'll do it myself. Now we are busy——"

Tuerny was gently pushing him toward the door; but I said that Judge Rankin and the Messrs. McFash wished to make a statement for publication; and Jance was back in a flash, poised, listening, waiting.

All faces peered at me doubtfully, wondering.

I told Jance he could fix it up any way he pleased unless the gentlemen themselves cared to be explicit; but the main thing was that they wished to correct certain remarks regarding myself that they had permitted to get into print a few days before. In looking further into the matter of my character and record they discovered that they had been grossly deceived by the information on which they had issued their previous statements.

"Is not that so, gentlemen?" I demanded, looking from one to the other as each in turn nodded slightly in an abashed, humiliated way.

"Oh—Jance," I added as he started to go. "If you call the chief of police in about an hour—not before—I believe he will tell you that Nan Hartigan has been located at Denver, where she is stopping with an aunt. There is no longer any suspicion that she was in Pollard's office at the time of his death or took the money. Call him in about an hour, Jance."

Jance's face was aglow with excitment and astonishment. He knew what was being done—but also he knew how seldom the real news of any story is given to the public; and with him it was all a part of the day's work.

And when he had gone Tuerny moved around toward me.

"You've got us in a —— of a hole. Know it?"

"Would my sincere regrets be of any use to you?" I asked.

"Not a —— bit. Sam, who's your family doctor? Call him up and tell him he's performed an autopsy on Pollard. You boys do the same. I don't know any doctors. I'll get hold of the coroner. Judge, I don't suppose your doctor ever performs autopsies—bein' fashionable, he cuts into people while they are alive. Everhard, if you want to do something to please this assembly, you'll go to China an'

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stay there; or, better still, fall overboard on the way."

With that he reached for the telephone.

XVIII

AND so that part of the affair was settled. The men were bluffed; intimidated by the audacity of my demands and the way in which they were made. Had I left them alone to exchange a half-dozen words together they would probably have gathered some courage to resist; then the situation would have reduced itself to one of crude threats and nothing could have been got out of them except by sheer menace.

Tuerny was a great help, for he cynically agreed that he and his friends might as well make the best of the conditions and rather led the way in doing what I wished; besides, the humiliation that hurt the others so deeply, especially Judge Rankin, did not have the slightest influence on Tuerny. He was of the coarse, bluff, generous, unhypocritical type of politician, with much that was likable and nothing that was admirable in his nature.

"Where is Hartigan?" Tuerny asked. "I'd like to see him. We'll make it up to him some way. Is he here?"

Hartigan was there, with Nan, who had returned with the Rankin chauffeur. Hartigan had been weary, worn out, and went to sleep on a couch; and probably dreamed of the jute-mill, but awoke to find soft arms about his neck and a sweet face, tearfully happy, pressed against his own.

"Yes; Hartigan—that's one of the things I wanted to talk with you gentlemen about," I said. "First, I want to assure you that I have here the original of the Pollard statement. If any one is in doubt he may examine the notary's seal——"

I held it to the light of the candelabra on the desk before Judge Rankin. He leaned over listlessly, glanced at the signature and seal, then nodded and straightened up, again expressionless, immobile.

One by one, excepting Tuerny, they looked at it; and I did not trust any of them and was alert. Tuerny said he didn't want to see the signature. He had looked at one signature already, and couldn't tell the difference. If I said this was the original, all right. It was the original. And how much did I want for it? Let the business be got over with as soon as possible.

"Of course," I said cynically, "you understand that I don't believe any of the statements made in this document; but unfortunately——"

"No bunk," said Tuerny. "You don't need be polite. You've got the goods an' we're in the market."

I took my time with the answer and turned from face to face. These were rich men, big men, important men, and they were taking orders from a gambler, a semi-disreputable person, and because they were crooks. The great value of being honest is that it gives no man the chance to use your own secrets as a club.

Then I told them that I was not after blackmail, that all I was demanding was something in the way of restitution for Hartigan.

I told them that down in the lowest resorts of the Coast there were codes of honor higher than their own, friends more loyal, men whose word could be more fully trusted. I was not excited about it, not even angry; but plain and matter of fact.

And I said:

"I shall keep this document until Hartigan is satisfied. I don't care how much he bleeds you or how hard he puts on the screws. He is entitled to all of his property and an indemnity——"

And a voice rang out from the far end of the room:

"I won't touch a —— cent of their money—not one penny of it do I want back!"

Hartigan, unobserved, had been listening at the doorway; and he came into the room with Nan, half-frightened and full of doubt, clinging to his arm. He came close and stopped, glaring from one to the other; and no one met his eyes except Judge Rankin, who sat stiffly, like an upright corpse except for the twitching of his cheek.

"I—I——"

Hartigan could scarcely speak. His voice gave way from anger. But jerkily he managed to say that he had come intending to kill somebody—not for the money. No. He wouldn't have the money. But for the way he had been double-crossed. And when he found out about his girl—what they accused her of——

He wanted to blast them with curses, but his throat tightened so that he could say nothing.

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"Father," I heard Nan say, and saw that she was trying to get him to leave.

"No—just a minute," I said, "and we will leave together."

And drawing a paper from my pocket, I handed it to Tuerny, saying—

"If you people agree to let Hartigan and me alone, burn this now."

"Don't, Don! Don't trust them!" Hartigan cried.

But I insisted. There was no money involved—they might keep their word.

"—— you!" said one of the McFashes under his breath.

"If there is any effort made to arrest Hartigan or myself I'll know that you haven't kept your word," I said impersonally, signing for Tuerny to burn the paper.

And he did. He flipped it open and, holding a corner to a candle-flame, set it on fire. In a moment it was ablaze, and when he had held it as long as he could he dropped it to the floor and stamped on the little piece of charred paper and ashes.

Then, in the midst of silence, while the five men sat with averted faces, Hartigan and Nan and I withdrew. We passed into the hall.

"Don, that was wrong—they can't be trusted!" Hartigan whispered bitterly.

"You think not? Go out of the door; shut it. I'll wait a minute after they think I am gone."

The front door closed; then silence.

Peeping, I could see them straighten up and look from one to the other, and there was a muffled oath or two; then Judge Rankin sprang up and cried:

"Quick—get headquarters. Tell them Hartigan's here in town. And that Everhard. Make them go on with the arrest. Telephone the paper—they must kill that story. Don't you see? We have got to do it! Our reputations will be ruined. People will know something has happened if we don't go on with it. The autopsy business—preposterous. The telephone——"

He himself snatched it up and called for a number that I recognized as headquarters.

I stepped into the doorway with upraised hand, saying:

"Just a minute, Rankin. I thought I would give you a chance to be honest—for once. But it is useless. Not even Tuerny there said a word in protest. So I might as well tell you that there were two forged copies of that Pollard statement. The one you burned was the other forgery. The original is still in my pocket, where I replaced it after you examined the signature. That is all, gentlemen."

I bowed politely, turned on my heel and walked from the house.

But there was nothing in my pocket. Tuerny had destroyed the original.

XIX

NOTHERE is nothing else much to be said. There was a tremendous sensation in the papers the next day; and an ever bigger one in the afternoon editions which carried the fact that Judge Douglas Rankin had committed suicide.

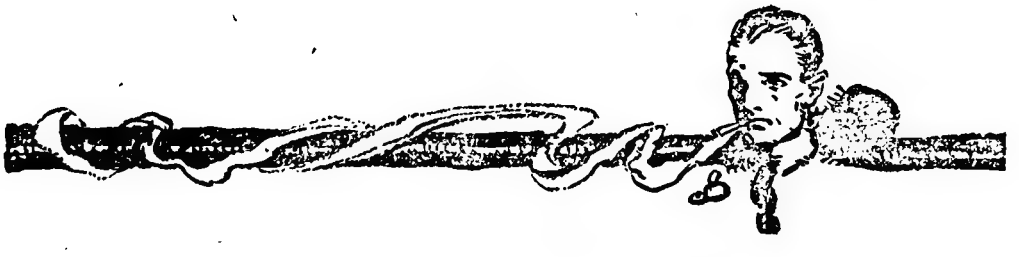
"Ill health," said his doctor.

Hartigan and Nan left for Australia and Rawlison went along. Rawlison had a big bank-account, and he confided to me that his chief reason in going was because the captain of the freighter could perform the wedding ceremony three miles out.

I thought it best to drop out of sight for a time, but before I went I had a talk with Hazel Guigane; and she told me that I was very stupid to have thought she meant what she had said about having been with Nan in Pollard's office. She had not meant it all; but I had got angry and went off in such a state of wrath that she hadn't had a chance to explain.

I believed her, didn't I?

And of course I said that I did.



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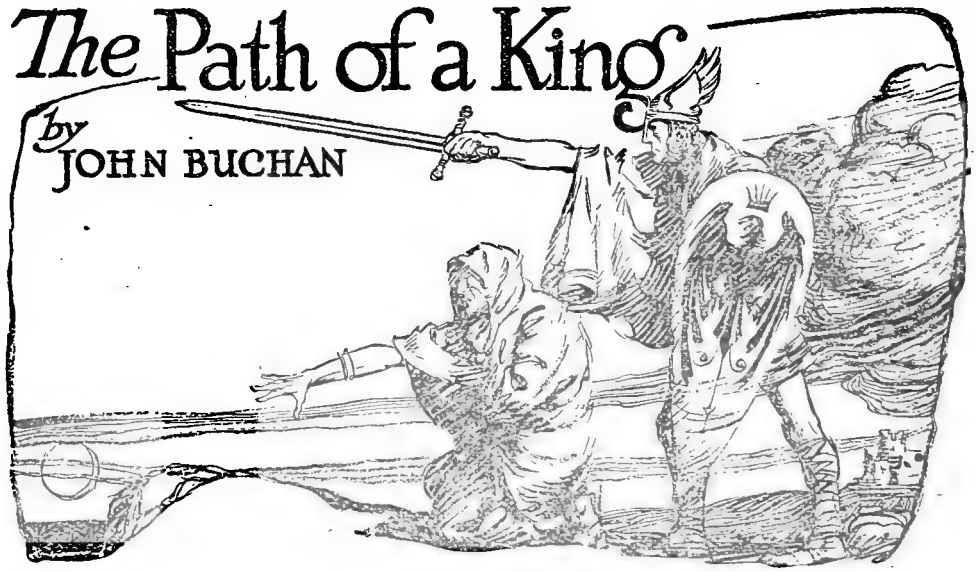
The Path of a King

by JOHN BUCHAN



Author of "Prester John"

The Story behind the Stories

SO THAT the general idea of this series of stories may be more visible in each issue, two of them each time appear together. For in the stories themselves there is practically nothing concrete to indicate any connection between one of them and any of the others. Each story stands entirely on its own feet, complete in itself and differing from all the others in place and time and plot. Yet through them all runs a Path—a Path of a thousand years—"The Path of a King."

You will note that practically the only surface suggestion of any kind of connection between one story and any of the others is that the king's ring of the old Norse viking, introduced in the first story, is more or less casually mentioned in following stories and of course is always in possession of some one descended from that king, though the king himself has long since faded from human memory.

THE three of us in that Winter camp in the Selkirks were talking the slow aimless talk of wearied men.

The Soldier, who had seen many campaigns, was riding his hobby of the Civil War—and descending on Lee's tactics in the last Wilderness struggle. I said something about the star romance of it—of Jeb Stuart flitting like a wraith through the forests; of Sheridan's attack at Chattanooga, when the charging troops on the ridge were silhouetted against the moon; of Leonidas Polk, last of the warrior bishops, baptizing his fellow generals by the light of a mess-candle.

"Romance," I said, "attended the somber gray and blue levies as faithfully as she ever rode with knight-errant or crusader."

The scholar, who was cutting a raw-hide thong, raised his wise eyes.

"Does it never occur to you fellows that we are all pretty mixed in our notions? We look for romance in the well-cultivated garden-plots, and when it springs out of virgin soil, we are surprized, though any fool might know it was the natural place for it."

He picked up a burning stick to relight his pipe.

"The things we call aristocracies and reign-

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ing houses are the last places to look for masterful men. They began strongly, but they have been too long in possession. They have been cosseted and comforted and the devil has gone out of their blood.

"Don't imagine that I undervalue descent. It is not for nothing that a great man leaves posterity. But who is most likely to inherit the fire—the elder son with his flesh-pots or the younger son with his fortune to find?

"Just think of it! All the younger sons of younger sons back through the generations! We none of us know our ancestors beyond a little way. We all of us may have king's blood in our veins. The dago who blacked my boots at Vancouver may be descended by curious byways from Julius Cæsar.

"Think of it!" he cried. "The spark once transmitted may smolder for generations under ashes, but the appointed time will come and it will flare up to warm the world. God never allows waste. And we fools rub our eyes and wonder when we see genius come out of the gutter. It didn't begin there. We tell ourselves that Shakespeare was the son of a woolpedler and Napoleon of a farmer and Luther of a peasant, and we hold up our hands at the marvel. But who knows what kings and prophets they had in their ancestry?"

After that we turned in, and as I lay looking at the frosty stars, a fancy wove itself in my brain. I saw the younger sons carry the royal blood far down among the people, down even into the kennels of the outcast. Generations follow, oblivious of the high beginnings, but there is that in the stock which is fated to endure. The sons and daughters blunder and sin and perish, but the race goes on, for there is a fierce stuff of life in it. It sinks and rises again and blossoms at haphazard into virtue or vice, since the ordinary moral laws do not concern its mission.

Some rags of greatness always cling to it, the dumb faith that some time and somehow the blood drawn from kings it never knew will be royal again. Though Nature is wasteful of material things, there is no waste of spirit. And then after long years, unheralded and unlooked for, there comes the day of the Appointed Time. . . .

These are the tales which grew out of that talk by the Winter fire.

Hightown Under Sunfell

The First Tale in the Series, "The Path of a King." Each Story Entirely Complete in Itself.

WHEN Biorn was a very little boy in his father's stead at Hightown, he had a play of his own making for the long Winter nights. At the back end of the hall, where the men sat at ale, was a chamber which the thralls used of a morning—a place which smelt of hams and meal and good provender. There a bed had been made for him when he forsook his cot in the women's quarters.

When the door was shut, it was black dark, save for a thin crack of light from the wood-fire and torches of the hall. The crack made on the earthen floor a line like a golden river.

Biorn, cuddled up on a bench in his little bearskin, was drawn like a moth to that stream of light. With his heart beating fast he would creep to it and stand for a moment with his small body bathed in the radiance. The game was not to come back at once, but to foray into the farther darkness before returning to the sanctuary of bed. That took all the fortitude in Biorn's heart, and not till the thing was dared and done could he go happily to sleep.

One night Leif the Outborn watched him at his game. Sometimes the man was permitted to sleep there when he had been making sport for the housecarls.

"Behold an image of life!" he had said in his queer outland speech. "We pass from darkness to darkness with but an instant of light between. You are born for high deeds, princeling. Many would venture from the dark to the light, but it takes a stout breast to voyage into the farther dark."

And Biorn's small heart swelled, for he detected praise, though he did not know what Leif meant.

In the long Winter the sun never topped

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Sunfell, and when the gales blew and the snow drifted there were lights in the hall the day long. In Biorn's first recollection the Winters were spent by his mother's side while she and her maids spun the wool of the last clipping.

She was a fair woman out of the Western Isles, all brown and golden as it seemed to him, and her voice was softer than the hard ringing speech of the wick-folk. She told him island stories about gentle fairies and good-humored elves who lived in a green windy country by Summer seas, and her air would be wistful as if she thought of her lost home. And she sang him to sleep with crooning songs which had the sweetness of the west wind in them. But her maids were a rougher stock, and they stuck to the Wicking lullaby, which ran something like this:

Hush thee, my bold one, a boat will I buy thee,
A boat and stout oars and a bright sword beside,
A helm of red gold and a thrall to be nigh thee,
When fair blows the wind at the next Wickingtide.

There was a second verse, but it was wild stuff, and the queen had forbidden the maids to sing it.

As he grew older, he was allowed to sit with the men in the hall, when bows were being stretched and bowstrings knotted and spear-halfts fitted. He would sit mum in a corner, listening with both ears to the talk of the old franklins, with their endless grumbles about lost cattle and ill neighbors. Better he liked the bragging of the young warriors, the berserks, who were the spear-head in all the forays. At the great feasts of Yuletide he was soon sent packing, for there were wild scenes when the ale flowed freely, though his father, King Ironbeard, ruled his hall with a strong hand.

From the speech of his elders Biorn made his picture of the world beyond the firths. It was a world of gloom and terror, yet shot with a strange brightness. The high gods might be met with in beggar's guise at any ferry, jovial fellows and good friends to brave men, for they themselves had to fight for their lives, and the End of All Things hung over them like a cloud. Yet till the day of Ragnarok there would be feasting and fine fighting and goodly fellowship, and a stout heart must live for the hour.

Leif the Outborn was his chief friend. The man was no warrior, being lame of a leg and lean and sharp as a heron. No one knew his begetting, for he had been found as a child on the high fells. Some said he was come of the Finns and his ill-wishers would have it that his birthplace had been behind a foss and that he had the blood of dwarves in him.

Yet though he made sport for the company, he had respect from them, for he was wise in many things, a skilled leech, a maker of runes and a crafty builder of ships. He was a master hand at riddles, and for hours the housecarls would puzzle their wits over his efforts. This was the manner of them.

"Who," Leif would ask, "are the merry maids that glide above the land to the joy of their father; in Winter they bear a white shield, but black in Summer?"

The answer was, "Snowflakes and rain." Or "I saw a corpse sitting on a corpse, a blind one riding on a lifeless steed?" To which the reply was, "A dead horse on an ice-floe."

Biorn never guessed any of the riddles, but the cleverness of them he thought miraculous, and the others roared with glee at their own obtuseness.

But Leif had different moods, for sometimes he would tell tales, and all were hushed in a kind of awe. The fire on the hearth was suffered to die down and men drew closer to one another as Leif told of the tragic love of Helgi and Sigrun, or how Weyland outwitted King Nidad, or how Thor went as bride to Thorgm in Giantland, and the old sad tale of how Sigurd Fafnirbane, noblest of men, went down to death for the love of a queen not less noble.

Leif told them well, so that his hearers were held fast with the spell of wonder and then spurred to memories of their own. Tongues would be loosened, and there would be wild recollections of battles among the skerries of the West, of huntings in the hills where strange sights greeted the benighted huntsman, and of voyaging far south into the lands of the sun, where the poorest thrall wore fine linen and the cities were all of gold and jewels.

Biorn's head would be in such a whirl after a night of story-telling that he could get no sleep for picturing his own deeds when he was man enough to bear a sword and launch his ship. And sometimes in his excitement he would slip outside into the darkness and hear far up in the frosty sky

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the whistle of the swans as they flew southward and fancy them the shield-maids of Odin on their way to some lost battle to choose the guests for Walhalla.

His father, Thorwald Thorwaldson, was king over all the firths and wicks between Coldness in the south and Flatness and the mountain Rauma in the north, and inland over the Uplanders as far as the highest springs of the rivers.

He was king by more than blood, for he was the tallest and strongest man in all the land, and the cunningest in battle. He was for ordinary somewhat grave and silent, a dark man with hair and beard the color of molten iron, whence came his byname. Yet in a fight no berserk could vie with him for fury, and his sword Tyrfing was famed in a thousand songs.

On high days the tale of his descent would be sung in the hall—not by Leif, who was low-born and of no account, but by one or other of the Chiefs of the Shield-ring. Biorn was happy on such occasions, for he himself came into the songs, since it was right to honor the gentle lady, the queen. He heard how on the distaff side he was sprung from proud Western earls—Thorwolf the Black and Halfdan and Hallward Skullsplitter. But on the spear side he was of still loftier kin, for Odin was first in his pedigree, and after him the Volsung chiefs and Gothfred the Proud, and—that no magnificence might be wanting—one Karlamagnus, whom Biorn had never heard of before, but who seemed from his doings to have been a puissant king.

ON SUCH occasions there would follow a bragging-match among the warriors, for a recital of the past was meant as an augury for the future. The time was toward the close of the Wicking-tide, and the world was becoming hard for simple folk. There were endless bickerings with the Tronds in the north and the men of More in the south, and a certain Shockhead, an up-setting king in Norland, was making trouble with his neighbors.

Likewise there was one Kristni, a king of the Romans, who sought to dispute with Odin himself. This Kristni was a magic-worker, who clad his followers in white linen instead of byrnie and gave them runes in place of swords and sprinkled them with witch-water. Biorn did not like what he heard of the warlock and longed for the day when his father Ironbeard would make an end of him.

Each year before the coming of Spring there was a lean season in Hightown. Fish were scarce in the ice-holes, the stock of meal in the meal-ark grew low and the deep snow made poor hunting in wood or on fellside. Belts were tightened and there were hollow cheeks among the thralls. And then one morning the wind would blow from the south and a strange smell come into the air. The dogs left their lair by the fire and, led by Garm the old blind patriarch, made a tour of inspection among the outhouses to the edge of the birch woods.

Presently would come a rending of the ice on the firth, and patches of inky water would show between the floes. The snow would slip from the fellside and leave dripping rock and clammy bent, and the river would break its frosty silence and pour a mighty gray-green flood to the sea. The swans and geese began to fly northward, and the pipits woke among the birches. And then one day the world put on a new dress, all steel-blue and misty green, and a thousand voices woke of flashing streams and nesting birds and tossing pines, and the dwellers in Hightown knew that Spring had fairly come.

Then was Biorn the happy child. All through the long day and through much of that twilight which is the darkness of a Norland Summer, he was abroad on his own errands. With Grim the Hunter he adventured far up on the fells and ate cheese and bannocks in the tents of the wandering Skridfinns or stalked the cailzie-cock with his arrows in the great pine forest, which in his own mind he called Mirkwood and feared exceedingly. Or he would go fishing with Egil the Fisherman, spearing salmon in the tails of the river-pools.

But best he loved to go up the firth in the boat which Leif had made him—a finished, clinker-built little model of a war-galley, christened the *Joy-Maker*—and catch the big sea-fish. Monsters he caught sometimes in the deep water under the cliffs, till he thought he was destined to repeat the exploit of Thor when he went fishing with the giant Hymi and hooked the Midgard Serpent, the brother of Fenris-Wolf, whose coils encircle the earth.

Nor was his education neglected. Arnwulf the Berserk taught him ax-play and

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sword-play, and he had a small buckler of his own, not of lindenwood like those of the wick-folk, but of wickerwork after the fashion of his mother's people. He learned to wrestle toughly with the lads of his own age and to throw a light spear truly at a mark. He was fleet of foot and scoured the fells like a goat, and he could breast the tide in the pool of the great foss up to the very edge of the white water where the trolls lived.

A wise woman dwelt on the bay of Sigg; Katla was her name, a woman still black-browed, though she was very old, and clever at mending hunters' scars. To her house Biorn went with Leif, and when they had made a meal of her barley-cakes and sour milk and passed the news of the coast, Leif would fall to probing her craft and get but surly answers.

To the boy's questions she was kinder.

"Let the dead things be, prince," she said. "There's small profit from fore-knowledge. Better to take fates as they come sudden round a turn of the road than be watching them with an anxious heart all the way down the hill. The time will come soon enough when you must stand by the Howe of the Dead and call on the ghost-folk."

But Leif coaxed and Biorn harped on the thing, as boys do; and one night about the mid-Summertime her hour came upon Katla and she spoke without their seeking. There in the dim hut with the apple-green twilight dimming the fells Biorn stood trembling on the brink of the half-world, and the woman sat huddled on the floor, her hand shading her eyes as if she were looking to a far horizon. Her body shook with gusts of passion, and the voice that came from her was not her own.

Never so long as he lived did Biorn forget the terrible hour when that voice from beyond the world spoke things he could not understand.

"I have been snowed on with snow," it said. "I have been beaten with the rain, I have been drenched with the dew; long have I been dead."

It spoke of kings whose names he had never heard and of the darkness gathering about the Norland and famine and awe stalking upon the earth.

Then came a whisper from Leif, asking the fortune of the young prince of Hightown.

"Death," said the weird-wife, "death—but not yet. The shears of the Norns are still blunt for him, and Skuld has him in keeping."

There was silence for a space, for the fit was passing from Katla. But the voice came again in broken syllables:

"His thread runs westward—beyond the Far Isles—not he but the seed of his loins shall win great kingdoms—beyond the Sea-walls. The All-Father dreams. Nay, he wakes—he wakes——"

There was a horrible choking sound, and the next Biorn knew was that Leif had fetched water and was dashing it on Katla's face.

IT WAS nearly a week before Biorn recovered his spirits after this adventure, and it was noticeable that neither Leif nor he spoke a word to each other on the matter. But the boy thought much, and from that night he had a new purpose. It seemed that he was fated to travel far and his fancy forsook the homely life of his own wicks and fells and reached to that out-world of which he had heard in the Winter's talk by the hall fire.

There were plenty of folk in Hightown to satisfy his curiosity. There were the berserks who would spin tales of the rich Frankish land and the green isles of the Gael. From the Skridfinns he heard of the bitter country in the north where the Jotuns dwelt and the sun was not and the frost split the rocks to dust, while far underground before great fires the dwarves were hammering gold. But these were only old wives' tales, and he liked better the talk of the sea-going franklins, who would sail in the Summertime on trading-ventures and pushed farther than any galleys of war. The old sailor, Othere Cranesfoot, was but now back from a wild voyage, which had taken him to Snowland, or, as we say, Iceland. He could tell of the Curdled Sea, like milk set apart for cheese-making, which flowed as fast as a river and brought down ghoulish beasts and great dragons in its tide.

He told, too, of the Sea-Walls which were the end of the world, waves higher than any mountain which ringed the whole ocean. He had seen them, blue and terrible one dawn, before he had swung his helm round and fled southward. And in Snowland and the ports of the Isles this Othere had heard talk from others of a fine land beyond the

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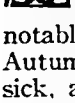
sunset, where corn grew unsown like grass and the capes looked like crusted cow-paths, they were so thick with deer, and the dew of the night was honey dew, so that of a morning a man might breakfast delicately off the face of the meadows.

Full of such marvels, Biorn sought Leif and poured out his heart to him. For the first time he spoke of the weird-wife's speaking. If his fortune lay in the West, there was the goal to seek. He would find the happy country and reign over it. But Leif shook his head, for he had heard the story before.

"To get there you will have to ride over Bilrost the Rainbow Bridge, like the gods. I know of the place. It is called Gundbiorn's Reef and it is beyond the world."

 ALL this befell in Biorn's eleventh Summer. The Winter which followed brought ill-luck to Hightown and notably to Ironbeard the King. For in the Autumn the queen, that gentle lady, fell sick, and, though leeches were sought for far and near and spells and runes were prepared by all who had skill of them, her life ebbed fast and ere Yule she was laid in the Howe of the Dead.

The loss of her made Thorwald grimmer and more silent than before, and there was no feasting at the Yule high-tide and but little at the Spring merrymaking.

As for Biorn he sorrowed bitterly for a week, and then, boy-like, forgot his grief in the wonder of living.

But that Winter brought death in another form. Storms never ceased, and in the New Year the land lay in the stricture of a black frost which froze the beasts in the byres and made Biorn shiver all the night through, though in ordinary Winter weather he was hardy enough to dive in the ice-holes. The stock of meal fell low, and when Spring tarried, famine drew very near.

Such a Spring no man living remembered. The snow lay deep on the shore till far into May. And when the winds broke, they were cold sunless gales which nipped the young life in the earth. The plowing was backward, and the seed-time was a month too late. The new-born lambs died on the fells and there fell a wasting sickness among the cattle.

Few salmon ran up the streams and the sea-fish seemed to have gone on a journey.

Even in Summer, the pleasant time, food was scarce, for the grass in the pastures was poor, and the cows gave little milk, and the children died. It foreboded a black harvest time and a blacker Winter.

With these misfortunes a fever rose in the blood of the men of Hightown. Such things had happened before, for the Norland was never more than one stage distant from famine, and in the old days there had been but a single remedy. Food and wealth must be won from a foray overseas.

It was years since Ironbeard had ridden Egifr's road to the rich lowlands, and the berserks were growing fat from idleness. Ironbeard himself was willing, for his hall was hateful to him since the queen's death. Moreover, there was no other way. Food must be found for the Winter or the folk would perish.

So a hosting was decreed at harvest-tide, for few men would be needed to win the blasted crops; and there began a jointing of shields and a burnishing of weapons and the getting ready of the big ships. Also there was a great sortilege-making. Whither to steer, that was the question. There were the rich coasts of England, but they were well guarded, and many of the Norland race were along the wardens. The isles of the Gael were in like case, and, though they were the easier prey, there was less to be had from them. There were soon two parties in the hall, one urging Ironbeard to follow the old track of his kin westward, another looking south to the Frankish shore.

The king himself, after the sacrifice of a black heifer, cast the sacred twigs, and they seemed to point to Frankland. Old Arnwulf was deputed on a certain day to hallow three ravens and take their guidance, but, though he said three times the ravens' spell, he got no clear counsel from the wise birds.

Last of all, the weird-wife Katla came from Sigg and for the space of three days sat in the hall with her head shrouded, taking no meat or drink. When at last she spoke she prophesied ill. She saw a red cloud and it descended on the heads of the warriors—yea, of the king himself. As for Hightown she saw it frozen deep in snow like Jotunheim, and rime lay on it like a place long dead. But she bade Ironbeard go to Frankland, for so it was written.

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"A great kingdom waits," she said, "not for you, but for the seed of your loins."

And Biorn shuddered, for they were the words spoken in her hut on that unforgotten mid-Summer night.

The boy was in agony lest he should be left behind. But his father decreed that he should go.

"These are times when manhood must come fast," he said. "He can bide within the shield-ring when blows are going. He will be safe enough if it holds. If it breaks he will sup like the rest of us with Odin."

Then came days of bustle and preparation. Biorn was agog with excitement and yet solemnised, for there was strange work afoot in Hightown. The king made a great festival in the Gods' House, the dark hall near the Howe of the Dead, where no one ventured except in high noon. Cattle were slain in honor of Thor, the god who watched over forays, and likewise a great boar for Frey. The blood was caught up in the sacred bowls, from which the people were sprinkled and smeared on the altar of blackened fir.

Then came the oath-taking, when Ironbeard and his berserks swore brotherhood in battle upon the ships' bulwarks and the shield's rim and the horse's shoulder and the brand's edge. There followed the mixing of blood in the same footprint, a rite to which Biorn was admitted, and a lesser oath for all the people on the gold ring which lay on the altar. But most solemn of all was the vow the king made to his folk, warriors and franklins alike, when he swore by the dew, the eagle's path and the valor of Thor.

Then came Biorn's turn. He was presented to the high gods as the prince and heir.

Old Arnwulf hammered on his left arm a torque of rough gold, which he must wear always in life and in death.

"I bring you the boy, Biorn Thorwaldson. When the gods call for Thorwald, it will be his part to lead the launchings and the seafarings and be first when blows are going. Do you accept him, people of Hightown?"

There was a swelling cry of assent and a beating of hafts on shields. Biorn's heart was lifted with pride, but out of a corner of his eye he saw his father's face. It was very grave, and his gaze was on vacancy.

Though it was a time of bustle, there was no joy in it, as there had been at other hostings. The folk were too hungry, the need was too desperate, and there was something else—a shadow of fate, which lay over Hightown. In the dark of night men had seen the bale-fires burning on the Howe of the Dead. A gray seal had been heard speaking with tongues off Siggness, and speaking ill words, said the fishermen who saw the beast. A white reindeer had appeared on Sunfell and the hunter who followed it had not been seen again.

By day too there was a brooding of hawks on the tide's edge, which was strange at that season. Worst portent of all, the floods of August were followed by high northeast winds that swept the clouds before them, so that all day the sky was a scurrying sea of vapor, and at nights the moon showed wild gray shapes moving ever to the west.

The dullest could not mistake their meaning; these were the dark horses and their riders, the Helmed Maidens, mustering for the battle to which Hightown was faring.

As Biorn stared one night at the thronged heavens, he found Leif by his elbow. In front of the dark company of the sky a white cloud was scudding, tinged with the pale moon. Leif quoted from the speech of the Giant-wife Rimegerd to Helgi in the song:

> Three nines of maidens ride,
> But one rides before them,
> A white maid helmed.
> From their manes the steeds shake
> Dew into the deep dales,
> Hail upon the high woods.

"It bodes well," said Biorn. "They ride to choose those whom they slay. There will be high doings ere Yule."

"Not so well," said Leif. "They come from the Norland, and it is our folk they go to choose. I fear me Hightown will soon be full of widow-women."

AT LAST came the day of sailing. The six galleys of war were brought down from their sheds, and on the rollers for the launching he-goats were bound so that the keels slid blood-stained into the sea. This was the roller-reddening, a custom bequeathed from their forefathers, though the old men of the place muttered darkly that the ritual had been departed from and that in the great days it was the blood not of goats but of captive foemen

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that had reddened the galleys and the tide.

The thralls sat at the thwarts, for there was no breeze that day in the narrow firth. Then came the chief warriors in short fur jackets, splendid in glittering helms and byrnies, and each with his thrall bearing his battle-ax. Followed the fighting commonalty with ax and spear. Last came Ironbeard, stern as ever, and Biorn with his heart torn between eagerness and regret. Only the children, the women and the old men were left in Hightown, and they stood on the shingle watching till the last galley had passed out of sight beyond Siggness and was swallowed up in the brume that cloaked the west.

There were no tears in that grim leave-taking. Hightown had faced the like before with a heavy heart, but with dry eyes and a proud head. Leif, though a cripple, went with the Wikings, for he had great skill of the sea.

There was not a breath of wind for three days and three nights, as they coasted southward with the peaks of the Norland on their port and to starboard the skerries that kept guard on the firths. Through the haze they could now and then see to landward trees and cliffs, but never a human face. Once there was an alarm of another fleet, and the shields were slung outboard, but it proved to be only a wedding party passing from wick to wick, and they gave it greeting and sailed on.

These were eery, cheerless days. The thralls sweated in shifts at the oars, and the better-born talked low among themselves, as if the air were full of ears.

"Ran is heating her ovens," said Leif, as he watched the warm fog mingle with the oar-thresh.

On the fourth morning there came a break in the clouds and the sight of a high hill gave Leif the clue for his reckoning. The prows swung seaward and the galleys steered for the broad ocean. That afternoon there sprang up the northeast wind for which they had been waiting. Sails were hoisted on the short masts, oars were shipped and lashed under the bulwarks, and the thralls clustered in the prows to rest their weary limbs and dice with knuckle-bones.

The spirits of all lightened, and there was loud talk in the sterns among the berserks. In the night the wind freshened, and the long shallow boats rolled filthily so that the teeth shook in a man's head, and over the swish of the waves and the creaking of the sheets there was a perpetual din of arms clashing. Biorn was miserably ill for some hours and made sport for the seasoned voyagers.

"It will not hold," Leif prophesied. "I smell rime ahead and quiet seas."

He had spoken truly for the sixth day the wind fell and they moved once more over still, misty waters. The thralls returned to their oars and the voices of the well-born fell low again. These were ghoulish days for Biorn, who had been accustomed only to the clear lights and the clear darkness of his own land. Only once in four days they saw the sun, and then it was as red as blood, so that his heart trembled.

On the eleventh day Ironbeard summoned Leif and asked his skill of the voyage.

"I know not," was the answer. "I can not steer a course except under clean skies. We ran well with the wind aback, but now I am blind, and the gods are pilots. Some day soon we must make landfall, but I know not whether on English or Frankish shores."

After that Leif would sit in long spells of brooding, for he had a sense in him of direction to which he sought to give free play—a sense built up from old voyages over these very seas. The result of his meditations was that he swung more to the south, and events proved him wise.

For on the fifteenth day came a lift in the fog and with it the noise of tides washing near at hand on a rough coast. Suddenly almost overhead they were aware of a great white headland, on the summit of which the sun shone on grass.

Leif gave a shout.

"My skill has not failed me," he cried. "We enter the Frankish firth. See, there is the butt of England!"

After that the helms were swung round and a course was laid south by west. And then the mist came again, but this time it was less of a shroud, for birds hovered about their wake, so that they were ever conscious of land. Because of the strength of the tides the rowers made slow progress and it was not till the late afternoon of the seventeenth day that Leif approached Ironbeard with a proud head and spoke a word. The king nodded and Leif took his stand in the prow with the lead in his hand.

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The sea mirroring the mist was leaden dull, but the old pilot smelt shoal water.

Warily he sounded, till suddenly out of the gloom a spit of land rose on the port and it was clear that they were entering the mouth of a river. The six galleys jolted across the sandbar, Leif in the foremost peering ahead and shouting every now and then an order. It was fine weather for a surprize landing. Biorn saw only low sand-dunes green with coarse grasses and somewhere behind the darkness of a forest.

But he could not tear his eyes from it, for it was the long-dreamed-of thing—Roman land.

Then a strange event befell. A madness seemed to come on Leif. He left his pilot's stand and rushed to the stern where the king stood. Flinging himself on his knees, he clasped Ironbeard's legs and poured out supplications.

"Return!" he cried. "While there is yet time, return. Seek England, Gael-land, anywhere, but not this place. I see blood in the stream and blood on the strand. Our blood, your blood, my king! There is doom for the folk of Thorwald by this river!"

The king's face did not change.

"What will be, will be," he said gravely. "We abide by our purpose and will take what Thor sends, with a stout heart. How say you, my brave ones?"

And all shouted to go forward, for the sight of a new country had fired their blood. Leif sat huddled by the bulwarks with a white face and a gasp in his throat, like one coming out of a swoon.

THEY went ashore at a bend of the stream where was a sandy cape, beached the galleys, felled trees from the neighboring forest and built them a stockade. The dying sun flushed water and wood with angry crimson, and Biorn observed that the men wrought, as it were, in a world of blood.

"That is the meaning of Leif's whimsies," he thought, and thereby comforted himself.

That night the Northmen slept in peace, but the scouts brought back word of a desert country, no men or cattle, and ashes where once had been dwellings.

"Our kinsfolk have been here before us," said King Ironbeard grimly.

He did not love the Danes, though he had fought by their side.

Half the force was left as a guard by the ships, and next day the rest went forward up the valley at a slant from the river's course. For that way, ran the tale, lay a great Roman house, a palace of King Kristni, where much gold was to be had for the lifting.

By midday they were among pleasant meadows, but the raiders had been there, for the houses were fired and the orchards hacked down. Then came a shout and, turning back, they saw a flame spring to the pale Autumn skies.

"The ships!" rose the cry, and the lightest of foot were sent back for news.

They returned with a sorry tale. Of the ships and the stockade nothing remained but hot cinders. Half the guard were dead, and old Arnwulf, the captain, lay blood-eagled on the edge of the tide. The others had gone they knew not where, but doubtless into the forests.

"Our kinsfolks' handiwork," said Ironbeard. "We are indeed forestalled, my heroes."

A council was held, and it was resolved to make a camp by the stream and defend it against all comers, till such time as under Leif's guidance new ships could be built.

"Axes will never ring on them," said Leif under his breath.

He walked now like a man who was fey, and his face was that of another world.

He spoke truth, for as they moved toward the river-bank, just before the darkening, in a glade between two forests Fate met them. There was barely time to form the shield-ring ere their enemies were upon them—a mass of wild-men in wolves' skins and at their head mounted warriors in byrnies with swords that flashed and fell.

Biorn saw little of the battle, wedged in the heart of the shield-ring. He heard the shouts of the enemy and the clangor of blows and the sharp intake of breath, but chiefly he heard the beating of his own heart. The ring swayed and moved as it gave before the onset or pressed to an attack of its own, and Biorn found himself stumbling over the dead.

"I am Biorn, and my father is king," he repeated to himself, the old spell he had so often used when on the fells or the firths he had met fear.

Night came and a young moon, and still the fight continued. But the shield-ring

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was growing ragged, for the men of Hightown were fighting one to eight, and these are odds that can not last. Sometimes it would waver and an enemy would slip inside, and before he sank dead, would have sorely wounded one of Ironbeard's company.

And now Biorn could see his father, larger than human, it seemed, in the dim light, swinging his sword Tyrfing and crooning to himself as he laid low his antagonists. At the sight a madness rose in the boy's heart. Behind in the sky clouds were banking—dark clouds like horses, with one ahead white and moon-tipped, the very riders he had watched with Leif from the firth-shore.

The Walkyries were come for the chosen, and he would fain be one of them. All fear had gone from him. His passion was to be by his father's side, and strike his small blow beside those mighty ones which Thor could not have bettered.

But even as he was thus uplifted, the end came. Thorwald Thorwaldson tottered and went down, for a hurled ax had cleft him between helm and byrnie. With him fell the last hope of Hightown and the famished clan under Sunfell. The shield-ring was no more. Biorn found himself swept back as the press of numbers overbore the little knot of sorely wounded men. Some one caught him by the arm and snatched him from the mêlée into the cover of a thicket. He saw dimly that it was Leif.

He was giddy and retching from weariness, and something inside him was cold as ice, though his head burned. It was not rage or grief, but awe, for his father had fallen and the end of the world had come. The noise of battle died, as the two pushed through the undergrowth and came into the open spaces of the wood.

IT WAS growing very dark, but still Leif dragged him onward. Then suddenly he fell forward on his face, and Biorn, as he stumbled over him, found his hands wet with blood.

"I am for death," Leif whispered. "Put your ear close, prince. I am Leif the Outborn and I know the hidden things. You are the heir of Thorwald Thorwaldson and you will not die. I see a long road, but at the end a great kingdom. Farewell, little Biorn. We have been good comrades, you and I. Katla from Sigg spoke the true word. . . ."

And when Biorn fetched water in his horn from a woodland pool, he found Leif with a cold brow.

Blind with sorrow and fatigue, the boy stumbled on without purpose. He was lonely in the wide world, many miles from his home, and all his kin were slain. Rain blew up from the southwest and beat in his face, the brambles tore his legs, but he was dead to all things. Would that the Shield Maids had chosen him to go with that brave company to the bright hall of Odin! But he was only a boy and they did not choose striplings.

Suddenly in a clearing a pin-point of light pricked the darkness.

The desire for human companionship came over him, even though it were that of enemy or outcast. He staggered to the door and beat on it feebly. A voice spoke from within, but he did not hear what it said.

Again he beat and again came the voice. And now his knocking grew feebler for he was at the end of his strength.

Then the bar was suddenly withdrawn and he was looking inside a poor hut smoky from the wood-fire in the midst of it. An old woman sat by it with a bowl in her hand, and an oldish man with a cudgel stood before him. He did not understand their speech, but he gathered he was being asked his errand.

"I am Biorn," he said, "and my father was Ironbeard the king."

They shook their heads, but since they saw only a weary tattered boy, they lost their fears. They invited him indoors, and their voices were kindly. Nodding with exhaustion, he was given a stool to sit on and a bowl of coarse porridge was put in his hands. They plied him with questions, but he could make nothing of their tongue.

Then the thrall rose, yawned and dropped the bar over the door. The sound was to the boy like the clanging of iron gates on his old happy world. For a moment he was on the brink of tears.

But he set his teeth and stiffened his drooping neck.

"I am Biorn," he said aloud, "and my father was a king."

They nodded to each other and smiled. They thought his words were a grace before meat.

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The Englishman*

The Second Tale in the Series "The Path of a King." Each Story Entirely Complete in Itself.

THE little hut among the oak-trees was dim in the October twilight on the evening of St. Callixtus' day. It had been used by swineherds, for the earthen floor was puddled by the feet of generations of hogs and in the corner lay piles of rotting acorns. Outside the mist had filled the forest and the ways were muffled with fallen leaves, so that the four men who approached the place came as stealthily as shades.

They reconnoitered a moment at the entrance, for it was a country of war.

"Quarters for the night," said one, and put his shoulder to the door of oak-toppings hinged on strips of cowhide.

But he had not taken a step inside before he hastily withdrew.

"There is something there," he cried. "Something that breathes. A light, Gil."

One of the four lighted a lantern from his flint and poked it within. It revealed the foul floor and the rotting acorns, and in the far corner on a bed of withered boughs something dark which might have been a man. They stood still and listened. There was the sound of painful breathing and then the gasp with which a sick man wakes. A figure disengaged itself from the shadows. Seeing it was but one man, the four pushed inside and the last pulled the door to behind him.

"What have we here?" the leader cried.

A man had dragged himself to his feet, a short square fellow, who held himself erect with a grip on a sidepost. His eyes were vacant, dazzled by the light and also by pain. He seemed to have had hard usage that day, for his shaggy locks were matted with blood from a sword-cut above his forehead, one arm hung limp and his tunic was torn and gashed. He had no weapons but a knife which he held blade-upward in the hollow of his big hand.

The four who confronted him were as ill-looking a quartet as Duke William's motley host could show. One, the leader, was an unfrocked priest of Rouen. One was a hedge-robber from the western marches who had followed Alan of Brittany; a third had the olive cheeks and the long nose of the South, and the fourth was a heavy German from beyond the Rhine. They were the kites that batten on the offal of war, and, the great battle on the seashore having been won by better men, were creeping furtively into the conquered land for the first fruits of its plunder.

"An English porker," cried the leader. "We will have the tusks off him."

Indeed in the wild light the wounded man, with his flat face and forked beard, had the look of a boar cornered by hounds.

" 'Ware his teeth," said the one they called Gil. "He has a knife in his trotter."

The evil faces of the four were growing merry. They were worthless soldiers but adepts in murder. Loot was their first thought, but after that, furtive slaying. There seemed nothing to rob here, but there was weak flesh to make sport of.

Gil warily crept on one side where he held his spear ready. The ex-priest, who had picked up somewhere a round English buckler, gave the orders.

"I will run in on him and take his stroke, so you be ready to close. There is nothing to be feared from the swine. See, he is blooded and faints."

The lantern had been set on the ground by the door and revealed only the lower limbs of the men. Their heads were murky in shadow. Their speech was foreign to the wounded man, but he saw their purpose. He was clearly foredone with pain, but his vacant eyes kindled to slow anger and he shook back his hair so that the bleeding broke out again on his forehead. He was as silent as a grim old tusker at bay in the woods.

The ex-priest gave the word and the four closed in on him. He defeated their plan by hurling himself on the leader's shield, so that his weight bore him backward and he could not use his weapon. The spears on the flanks failed for the same reason, and the two men posted there had well nigh been the death of each other. The fourth, the one from the South, whose business it had been to support the priest, tripped and fell sprawling beside the lantern.

The Englishman had one arm around the priest's neck and was squeezing the breath

*See note to preceding story.

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out of him. But the blood of the four was kindling, and they had vengeance instead of sport to seek. Shouting curses, the three of them went to the rescue of the leader, and a weaponless and sore-wounded man can not strive with such odds. They overpowered him, bending his arms viciously back and kicking his broken head. Their oaths filled the hut with an ugly clamor, but no sound came from their victim.

Suddenly a gust of air set the lantern flickering, and a newcomer stood in the doorway. He picked up the light and looked down on the struggle. He was a tall, very lean man, smooth-faced and black-haired, helmetless and shieldless but wearing the plated hauberk of the soldier. There was no scabbard on his left side, but his right hand held a long, bright sword.

For a second he lifted the light high, while he took in the scene. His eyes were dark and dancing, like the ripples on a peat stream.

"So-ho!" he said softly. "Murder! And by our own vermin!"

He appeared to brood for a second, and then he acted. For he set the light very carefully in the crock of a joist so that it illumined the whole hut. Then he reached out a hand, plucked the ex-priest from his quarry and, swinging him in both arms, tossed him through the door into the darkness. It would seem that he fell hard, for there was a groan and then silence.

"One less," he said softly.

The three had turned to face him, warned by Gil's exclamation, and found themselves looking at the ominous bar of light which was his sword. Cornered like rats, they took small comfort from the odds. They were ready to surrender, still readier to run, and they stood on their defense with no fight in their faces, whining in their several *patois*.

All but the man from the South. He was creeping round in the darkness by the walls and had in his hands a knife. No mailed hauberk protected the interloper's back and there was a space there for steel to quiver between his shoulder-blades.

THE newcomer did not see, but the eyes of the wounded man seemed to have been cleared by the scuffle. He was now free, and from the floor he snatched the round shield which the ex-priest had carried and hurled it straight at the creeping miscreant. It was a heavy oaken thing with rim and boss of iron, and it caught him fairly above the ear, so that he dropped like a poled steer.

The stranger turned his head to see what was happening.

"A lucky shot, friend," he cried. "I thank you."

And he addressed himself to the two pitiful bandits who remained.

But their eyes were looking beyond him to the door, and their jaws had dropped in terror. For from outside came the sound of horses' hoofs and bridles, and two riders had dismounted and were peering into the hut. The first was a very mountain of a man, whose conical helmet surmounted a vast pale face, on which blond mustaches hung like the teeth of a walrus.

The said helmet was grievously battered, and the nose-piece was awry as if from some fierce blow, but there was no scar on the skin. His long hauberk was wrought in scales of steel and silver, and the fillets which bound his great legs were of fine red leather. Behind him came a grizzled squire, bearing a kite-shaped shield painted with the cognizance of a dove.

"What have we here?" said the knight in a reedy voice like a boy's.

His pale eyes contemplated the figures—the wounded man, now faint again with pain and half-fallen on the litter of branches; his deliverer, tall and grim, but with laughing face; the two murderers cringing in their fear; in a corner the huddled body of the man from the South half-hidden by the shield.

"Speak, fellow," and he addressed the soldier. "What work has been toward? Have you not had your bellyful of battles that you must scrabble like rats in this hovel? What are you called, and whence came you?"

The soldier lifted his brow, looked his questioner full in the face, and, as if liking what he found there, bowed his head in respect. The huge man had the air of one to be obeyed.

"I am of the duke's army," he said, "and was sent on to reconnoiter the forest-roads. I stumbled on this hut and found four men about to slay a wounded English. One lies outside where I flung him, another is there with a cracked skull, and you have before you the remnant."

The knight seemed to consider.

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"And why should a soldier of the duke's be so careful of English lives?" he asked.

"I would help my lord duke to conquer this land," was the answer. "We have broken their army and the way is straight before us. We shall have to fight other armies, but we can not be fighting all our days, and we do not conquer England till England accepts us. I have heard enough of that stubborn people to know that the way to win them is not by murder. A fair fight and then honest dealing and mercy, say I."

The knight laughed.

"A Solomon in judgment," he cried. "But who are you that bear a sword and wear gold on your finger?"

The old squire broke in.

"My lord count, I know the man. He is a hunter of the Lord Odo's and has a name for valor. He wrought mightily this morning on the hill. They call him Jehan the Hunter and sometimes Jehan the Outborn, for no man knows his comings. There is a rumor that he is of high blood, and truly in battle he bears himself like a prince. The monks loved him not, but the Lord Odo favored him."

The knight looked steadily for the space of a moment at the tall soldier, and his light eyes seemed to read deep.

"Are you that man?" he asked at last, and got the reply—

"I am Jehan the Hunter."

"Bid my fellows attend to yon scum," he told his squire. "The camp marshal will have fruit for his gallows. The sweepings of all Europe have drifted with us to England, and it is our business to make bonfire of them before they breed a plague.

"See to the wounded man likewise. He may be one of the stout housecarls who fought with Harold at Stamford, and to meet us raced through the length of England like a Winter gale. By the mount of the archangel I would fain win such mettle to our cause."

Presently the hut was empty save for the two soldiers, who faced each other while the lantern flickered to its end on the rafters.

"The good Odo is dead," said the knight. "An arrow in the left eye has bereft our duke of a noble ally and increased the blessedness of the City of Paradise. You are masterless now. Will you ride with me on my service, you Jehan the Hunter? It would appear that we are alike in our ways of thinking. They call me 'the Dove' from the shield I bear, and a dove I seek to be in the winning of England. The hawk's task is over when the battle is won, and he who has but the sword for weapon is no hawk but carrion-crow.

"We have to set our duke on the throne, but that is but the first step. There are more battles before us, and when they are ended begins the slow task of the conquest of English hearts. How say you, Jehan? Will you ride north with me on this errand and out of the lands which are granted me to govern have a corner on which to practise your creed?"

So it befell that Jehan the Hunter, sometimes called Jehan the Outborn, joined the company of Ivo of Dives and followed him when Duke William swept northward, laughing his gross jolly laughter and swearing terribly by the splendor of God.

II

TWO years later in the same month of the year Jehan rode east out of Ivo's new castle of Belvoir to visit the manor of which, by the grace of God and the king and the favor of the Count of Dives, he was now the lord. By the Dives' side he had been north to Durham and west to the Welsh marches, rather on falcon's than on dove's errands, for Ivo held that the crowning of peace-notes came only after hard blows.

But at his worst he was hawk and not crow, and malice did not follow his steps. The men he beat had a rude respect for one who was just and patient in victory and whose laughter did not spare himself. Like master, like man; and Jehan was presently so sealed of Ivo's brotherhood that in the tales of the time the two names were rarely separate. The jealous, swift to deprecate good-fortune, spared the Outborn, for it was observed that he stood aside while others scrambled for gain and sought nothing. Also, though no man knew his birth, he bore himself with the pride of a king.

When Ivo's raw stone towers had faded in the blue distance, the road led from shaggy uplands into a forested plain, with knolls at intervals which gave the traveler a prospect of sullen levels up to the fringe of the fens and the line of the sea. Six

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men-at-arms jolted at his back on little country-bred horses, for Jehan did his tasks with few helpers; and they rode well in the rear, for he loved to be alone.

The weather was all October gleams and glooms, now the sunshine of April, now the purple depths of a thunderstorm. There was no rain in the air, but an infinity of mist, which moved in fantastic shapes, rolling close about the cavalcade, so that the very road-edge was obscured, now dissolving into clear light, now opening up corridors at the end of which some landmark appeared at an immeasurable distance. In that fantastic afternoon the solid earth seemed to be dissolving, and Jehan's thoughts as he journeyed ranged like the mists.

He told himself that he had discovered his country. He, the Outborn, had come home; the landless had found his settlement. He loved every acre of this strange England—its changing skies, the soft pastures in the valleys, the copses that clung like moss to the hills, the wide moorland that lay quiet as a grave from mountain to mountain.

But this day something new had been joined to his affection. The air that met him from the east had that in it which stirred some antique memory. There was brine in it from the unruly eastern sea, and the sourness of marsh-water and the sweetness of marsh-herbage. As the forest thinned into scrub again, it came stronger and fresher, and he found himself sniffing it like a hungry man at the approach of food.

"If my manor of Highstead is like this," he told himself, "I think I will lay my bones there."

At a turn of the road where two grassy tracks forked he passed a graven stone, now chipped and moss-grown, set on a little eminence among reddening thorns. It was an altar to the old gods of the land; there had been another such in the forest of his childhood. The priest had told him it was the shrine of the Lord Apollo and forbade him on the pain of a mighty cursing to do reverence to it. Nevertheless he had been wont to doff his cap when he passed it, for he respected a god that lived in the woods instead of a clammy church.

Now the sight of the ancient thing seemed an omen. It linked up the past and the present. He waved a greeting to it.

"Hail, old friend," he said. "Bid your master be with me, whoever he be, for I go to find a home."

One of his fellows rode up to his side.

"We are within a mile of Highstead," he told him. "Better go warily, for the king's law runs limpingly in the fenlands. I counsel that a picket be sent forward to report if the way be clear. Every churl we passed on the road will have sent news of our coming."

"So much the better," said Jehan. "Man, I come not as a thief in the night. This is a daylight business. If I am to live my days here, I must make a fair conquest."

The man fell back sullenly and there were anxious faces in the retinue jogging twenty yards behind. But no care sat on Jehan's brow. He plucked sprays of Autumn berries and tossed and caught them; he sang gently to himself and spoke his thoughts to his horse. Harm could not come to him when air and scene woke in his heart such strange familiarity.

A last turn of the road showed Highstead before him two furlongs distant. The thatched roof of the hall rose out of a cluster of shingled huts on a mound defended by moat and palisade. No smoke came from the dwelling and no man was visible, but not for nothing was Jehan named "the Hunter." He was aware that every tuft of reed and scrog of wood concealed a spear or a bowman. So he set his head stiff and laughed and hummed a bar of a song which the ferrymen used to sing on Seineside.

"A man does not fight to win his home," he told his horse, "but only to defend it when he has won it. If God so wills, I shall be welcomed with open gates; otherwise there will be burying ere nightfall."

In this fashion he rode steadfastly toward the silent burg. Now he was within a stone's throw of it, and no spear had been launched; now he was before the massive oaken gate.

Suddenly it swung open and a man came out. He was a short, square fellow who limped, and, half-hidden by his long hair, a great scar showed white on his forehead.

"In whose name?" he asked in the English tongue.

"In the name of our lord the king and the Earl Ivo."

"That is no passport," said the man.

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"In my own name, then—in the name of Jehan the Hunter."

The man took two steps forward and laid a hand on the off-stirrup. Jehan leaped to the ground and kissed him on both cheeks.

"We have met before, friend," he said, and he took between his palms the joined hands of his new liege.

"Two years back on the night of Hastings," said the man. "But for that meeting, my lord, you had tasted twenty arrows betwixt Highstead and the forest."

III

"I GO to visit my neighbors," said Jehan next morning.

Arn the Steward stared at his master with a puzzled face.

"You will get a dusty welcome," he said. "There is but the Lady Hilda at Galland, and her brother Aelward is still at odds with your duke."

Nevertheless Jehan rode out in a clear dawn of St. Luke's Summer, leaving a wondering man behind him, and he rode alone, having sent back his men-at-arms to Ivo.

"He has the bold heart," said Arn to himself. "If there be many French like him, there will assuredly be a new England."

At Galland, which is low down in the fen-country, he found a sullen girl. She met him at the bridge of the Galland Fen and her gray eyes flashed fire. She was a tall maid, very fair to look upon, and the blue tunic which she wore over her russet gown was cunningly embroidered. Embroidered too with gold was the hood which confined her plaited yellow hair.

"You find a defenseless house and a woman to conquer," she railed.

"Long may it need no better warder," said Jehan, dismounting and looking at her across the waters. "The fortune of war has given me a home, mistress. I would dwell in amity with my neighbors."

"Amity," she cried in scorn. "You will get none from me. My brother Aelward will do the parleying."

"So be it," he said. "Be assured I will never cross this water into Galland till you bid me."

He turned and rode home and for a month was busied with the work of his farms. When he came again, it was on a dark day in November, and every runnel of the fens was swollen. He got the same answer from the girl, and with it a warning.

"Aelward and his men wait for you in the oakshaw," she told him. "I sent word to them when the thralls brought news of you."

And her pretty face was hard and angry.

Jehan laughed.

"Now by your leave, mistress, I will wait here the hour or two till nightfall. I am Englishman enough to know that your folk do not strike in the dark."

He turned to Highstead unscathed, and a week later came a message from Aelward.

> Meet me tomorrow by the Danes' barrow at noon, and we will know whether Englishman or Frenchman is to bear rule in this land.

Jehan donned his hauberk and girt himself with his long sword.

"There will be hot work today in that forest," he told Arn, who was busied with the trussing of his mail.

"God prosper you, master," said the steward. "Frenchman or no, you are such a man as I love. Beware of Aelward and his downward stroke, for he has the strength of ten."

At noon by the Danes' barrow Jehan met a young tow-headed giant who spoke with the back of his throat and made surly responses to the other's greeting. It was a blue Winter's day, with rime still white on the grass, and the forest was very still. The Saxon had the shorter sword and a round buckler; Jehan fought only with his blade.

At the first bout they strove with steel, and well ill-matched at that, for the heavy strength of the fenman was futile against the lithe speed of the Hunter. Jehan ringed him in circles of light, and the famous downward stroke was expended on air.

He played with him till he breathed heavily like a cow, and then by a sleight of hand sent his sword spinning among the oak mast. The young giant stood sulkily before him, unarmed, deeply shamed, waiting on his death, but with no fear in his eyes.

Jehan tossed his own blade to the ground and stripped off his hauberk.

"We have fought with weapons," he said. "Now we will fight in the ancient way."

There followed a very different contest. Aelward lost his shamefastness and his slow blood fired as flesh met flesh and sinew strained against sinew. His great arms crushed the Frenchman till his ribs cracked,

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but always the other slipped through and evaded the fatal hug. And as the struggle continued, Aelward's heart warmed to his enemy. When their swords crossed he had hated him like death; now he seemed to be striving with a kinsman.

Suddenly, when victory looked very near, he found the earth moving from beneath him and a mountain descended on his skull. When he blinked himself into consciousness again, Jehan was laving his head from a pool in an oak-root.

"I will teach you that throw some day, friend," he was saying. "Had I not known the trick of it, you had mauled me sadly. I had liefer grapple with a bear."

Aelward moistened his lips.

"You have beat me fairly, armed and weaponless," he said, and his voice had no anger in it.

"Talk not of beating between neighbors," was the answer. "We have played together and I have had the luck of it. It will be your turn to break my head tomorrow."

"Head matters little," grumbled Aelward. "Mine has stood harder dints. But you have broken my leg, and that means a month of housekeeping."

Jehan made splints of ash for the leg and set him upon his horse, and in this wise they came to the bridge of Galland Fen. On the far side of the water stood the Lady Hilda. He halted and waited on her bidding. She gazed speechless at the horse whereon sat her brother with a clouted scalp.

"What ails you, Frenchman?" said Aelward. "It is but a half-grown girl of my father's begetting."

"I have vowed not to pass that bridge till yonder lady bids me."

"Then for the pity of Christ bid him, sister. He and I are warm with play and yearn for a flagon."

In this manner did Jehan first enter the house of Galland, whence in the next cowslip time he carried a bride to Highstead.

IV

THE months passed smoothly in the house on the knoll above the fat fen pastures. Jehan forsook his woodcraft for the work of byre and furrow and sheepfold, and the yield of his lands grew under his wardenship. He brought heavy French cattle to improve the little native breed and made a garden of fruit-trees where once had been only bent and sedge.

The thralls wrought cheerfully for him, for he was a kindly master, and the freemen of the manor had no complaint against one who did impartial justice and respected their slow and ancient ways. As for skill in hunting, there was no fellow to the lord of Highstead between Trent and Thames.

Inside the homestead the Lady Hilda moved happily, a wife smiling and well content. She had won more than a husband; it seemed she had made a convert, for daily Jehan grew into the countryside as if he had been born in it. Something in the soft woodland air and the sharper tang of the fens and the sea awoke response from his innermost soul.

An aching affection was born in him for every acre of his little heritage. His son, dark like his father, who made his first diffident pilgrimages in the sunny close where the pigeons cooed, was not more thirled to English soil.

They were quiet years in that remote place, for Aelward over at Galland had made his peace with the king. But when the little Jehan was four years old, the tides of war lapped again to the forest-edges. One Hugo of Auchy, who had had a usurer to his father and had risen in an iron age by a merciless greed, came a-foraging from the north to see how he might add to his fortunes.

Men called him the Crane, for he was tall and lean and parchment-skinned, and to his banner resorted all malcontents and broken men. He sought to conduct a second conquest, making war on the English who still held their lands, but sparing the French manors. The king's justice was slow-footed, and the king was far away, so the threatened men banded together to hold their own by their own might.

Aelward brought the news from Galland that the Crane had entered their borders. The good Ivo was overseas, busy on the Brittany marches, and there was no ruler in Fenland.

"You he will spare," Aelward told his sister's husband. "He does not war with you newcomers. But us of the old stock he claims as his prey. How say you, Frenchman? Will you reason with him? Hereways we are peaceful folk, and would fain get on with our harvest."

"I will reason with him," said Jehan,

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"and by the only logic that such carrion understand. I am by your side, brother. There is but the one cause for all us countrymen."

But that afternoon as he walked abroad in his yellow cornlands he saw a portent. A heron rose out of the shallows and a harrier-hawk swooped to the pounce, but the long bird flopped securely into the western sky and the hawk dropped at his feet, dead but with no mark of a wound.

"Here be marvels," said Jehan, and with that there came on him the forebodings of fate, which in the brave heart wakes awe but no fear.

He stood silent for a time and gazed over his homelands. The bere was shaking white and gold in the light evening wind; in the new orchard he had planted the apples were reddening; from the edge of the forestland rose wreaths of smoke where the thralls were busy with wood-clearing. There was little sound in the air, but from the steading came the happy laughter of a child. Jehan stood very still, and his wistful eyes drank the peace of it.

"*Non nobis, domine*," he said, for a priest had once had the training of him. "But I leave that which shall not die."

He summoned his wife and told her of the coming of the Crane. From a finger of his left hand he took the thick ring of gold which Ivo had marked years before in the Wealden hut.

"I have a notion that I am going a long journey," he told her. "If I do not return, the Lord Ivo will confirm the little lad in these lands of ours. But to you and for his sake I make my own bequest. Wear this ring for him till he is a man, and then bid him wear it as his father's guerdon. I had it from my father, who had it from his, and my grandfather told me the tale of it.

"In his grandsire's day it was a mighty armlet, but in the famine-years it was melted and part sold, and only this remains. Some one of us far back was a king, and this is the badge of a king's house. There comes a day, little one, when the fruit of our bodies will possess a throne. See that the lad is royal in thought and deed, as he is royal in blood."

Next morning he kissed his wife and fondled his little son, and with his men rode northward, his eyes wistful but his mouth smiling.

What followed was for generations a tale among humble folk in England who knew nothing of the deeds of the king's armies. By cottage-fires they wove stories about it and made simple songs, the echo of which may still be traced by curious scholars. There is something of it in the great saga of Robin Hood, and long after the fens were drained, women hushed their babies with snatches about the Crane and the Falcon, and fairy-tales of a certain John of the Shaws, who became one with Jack the Giant-Killer and all the nursery heroes.

Jehan and his band met Aelward at the appointed rendezvous and soon were joined by a dozen knots of lusty yeomen who fought not only for themselves but for the law of England and the peace of the new king. Of the little force Jehan was appointed leader, and once again became the Hunter, stalking a baser quarry than wolf or boar. For the Crane and his rabble, flushed with easy conquest, kept ill watch, and the tongues of forest running down to the fenland made a good hunting-ground for a wary forester.

Jehan's pickets found Hugo of Auchy by the Sheen brook and brought back tidings. Thereupon a subtle plan was made. By day and night the invader's camp was kept uneasy; there would be sudden attacks, which died down after a few blows; stragglers disappeared, scouts never returned, and when a peasant was brought in and forced to speak, he told with scared face a tale of the great mustering of desperate men in this or that quarter.

The Crane was a hardy fighter, but the mystery baffled him, and he became cautious, and—after the fashion of his kind—credulous. Bit by bit Jehan shepherded him into the trap he had prepared. He had but one man to the enemy's six and must drain that enemy's strength before he struck. Meantime the little steadings went up in flames, but with every blaze seen in the Autumn dusk the English grew more stubborn. They waited confidently on the reckoning.

It came on a bleak morning when the east wind blew rain and fog from the sea. The Crane was in a spit of open woodland with before him and on either side deep fenland with paths known only to its dwellers.

Then Jehan struck. He drove his enemy

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to the point of the dry ground and thrust his into the morasses. Not since the time of the Danes had the land known such a slaying. The refuse of France and the traitor English who had joined them went down like sheep before wolves.

When the lord Ivo arrived in the late afternoon, having ridden hotspeed from the south coast when he got the tidings, he found little left of the marauders, save the dead on the land and the scum of red on the fen-pools.

Jehan lay by a clump of hazels, the blood welling from an ax wound in the neck. His face was ashen with the oncoming of death, but he smiled as he looked up at his lord.

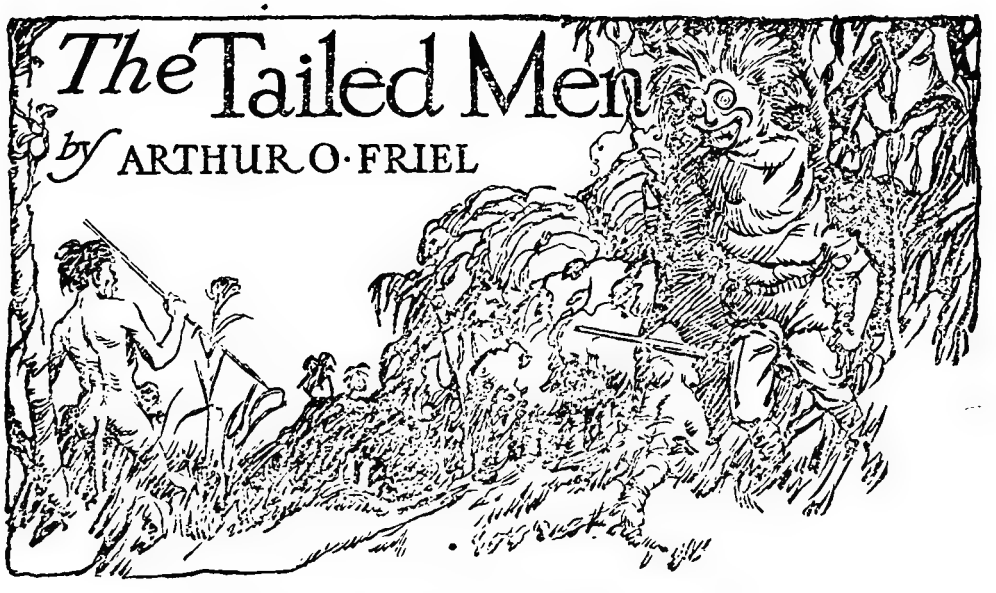
"The Crane pecked me," he said. "He had a stout bill, if a black heart."

Ivo wept aloud, being pitiful as he was brave. He would have scoured the country for a priest.

"Farewell, old comrade," he sobbed. "Give greeting to Odo in paradise and keep a place for me by your side. I will nourish your son, as if he had been that one of my own whom Heaven has denied me. Tarry a little, dear heart, and the Priest of Glede will be here to shrive you."

Through the thicket there crawled a mighty figure, his yellow hair dabbled in blood and his breath laboring like wind in a threshing-floor. He lay down by Jehan's side and with a last effort kissed him on the lips.

"Priest!" cried the dying Aelward. "What need is there of priest to help us two English on our way to God?"



Author of "The Spider," "The Mother of the Moon," etc.

THOSE are true words, *senhor*, though spoken in jest. You say that if men were shaped to fit their natures some would find it hard to wear hat and trousers, because they would have horns and tails.

I have met men who should have been so marked, and who ought also to have had claws instead of hands and split hoofs instead of feet; for, though their bodies were human, they were fiends at heart. True, in time their malice became known, and at last their own evil deeds caused their deaths, but not until they had brought much misery to others. How much blood and tears could be saved if only *Deos Padre* would make men—and women too—so that their natures could be seen at once.

Yes, that is a useless wish. But your remark, *senhor*, brings to my mind a memory of the strangest creatures I ever saw—creatures so queer that perhaps you will not believe me when I tell of them. Yet the tale will pass the time while we lounge here on

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the steamer's deck, and anything which kills the tedium of this long journey down the Amazon is worth while.

Now you two North American explorers, if I am not mistaken, have been adventuring in the country along the river Javary and westward in Peru toward the Ucayali. Then you have not visited the river Jurua, east of the Javary? It is well. If ever you return to Brazil and go far up that river, be prepared for trouble.

I have been there—and I am not going back. If the floods had not been very heavy that year I should never have gone there at all. With my comrade, Pedro Andrada, I had recently been out on a long rambling trip through the wild jungle along the border of Brazil and Peru, and there we had met with hardships which made us satisfied to stay in idleness at Remate de Males, a Javary town where we rubber-workers gathered in the rainy season. But now, loafing one day at the store of a trader with nothing to do but smoke and watch the dirty waters swirling past, we grew restless again.

"Lourenço, too much idleness is worse than too much work," said Pedro, yawning and stretching his powerful arms. "I feel stupid, and you are getting fat. If the flood does not go down soon you will get such a big belly that you will grunt like a sloth every time you tap a tree."

This was only a joke, for, though I am broad and had grown heavy from inaction, I had not swollen up along the belt-line. But I felt sluggish, as he did, and so weary of lounging that I wished some one would start a fight, or anything else that would quicken my blood. Lazily I tried to think of something we could do, but the only ideas that came to me were old ones and not worth trying. So I only grunted and sat still, looking up the river.

Something was floating down toward us and I watched it because there was nothing else to look at—drifting trees were so common that I hardly ever noticed them. As this thing came nearer, though, I saw that it was not a tree but a small canoe. It swung slowly around on the current, seeming empty and useless.

"There is something we can do," I said, nodding toward it. "A short paddle will stretch our muscles and give us another boat."

He yawned again and untied our own canoe, fastened to a post of the store. I got up and splashed toward it—the water was so high that, in spite of the tall poles on which the store stood, it flowed over the platform—and we were about to step in when Pedro started.

"*Por amor de Deos!*" he cried. "Look!"

The drifting boat was quite near us now. Above its edge something had risen and was moving weakly in little jerks; a thing like a skinny claw, or the hand of a man almost dead from starvation or fever, trying to attract attention and bring help. As we stared it dropped out of sight.

Without a word we leaped into our canoe and drove our paddles in deep. We were both old in the ways of the bush, and we knew what to expect. Yet the man we found out there on the river was in such a condition that even we, who had looked on many hard sights, turned cold as we stared down at him.

He seemed dead. His eyes were fixed and glassy, his mouth open, his chest motionless, his body shrunken to a skeleton. This did not disturb us, for we who work in the jungle of Javary see much of death. He was totally naked, and scabbed from head to foot by the bites of thousands of *piums* or *carrapatos*. Yet this did not shock us either, for any man who travels the Brazilian bush will be badly bitten at times by insects, and if he loses his clothing he will suffer much. The things that chilled us were two—the fear stamped deep in his ghastly face, and the marks of torture.

The scars were not new, but they were plain. They were the marks of fire and knife. And the worst of all was that he had been not only burned and cut, but mutilated.

Gripping the edge of his canoe, we went drifting down the current, looking at him and at each other. It seemed useless to take him ashore, for there was nothing to show who he was or whence he came, and the water was so high that we should have some trouble in finding a good place to bury him. Yet we nodded to each other, and were preparing to tow him in, when we jumped as if a snake had struck at us. He moved!

We had fully decided that he was dead, and that the fluttering movement of the hand we had seen was his last struggle. And when you see a dead man move, *senhores*, you are likely to recoil from him. We twitched our hands away from his boat.

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Before it could float off, though, we grabbed it again and hung on. His movement had been slight, only a quivering of the arms and a rise of the chest, with a low moaning sound as he breathed. Now, seeing that he still lived, we swiftly fastened his craft to ours and bent our paddles in hard strokes back to town.

Other men loafing at the doors facing the river had been watching us, and some of them were coming in their *montarias* and dugouts to see what we had found. Warning them out of the way, we drove ahead at full speed straight to the small *barracão* where we lived. There we put him into a hammock and poured brandy into his mouth.

He strangled, shivered a little, and coughed. We rubbed his cold hands and feet, raised and lowered his arms and legs, and gave him more brandy. Soon he began to breathe more deeply, and his eyes moved and stared at us. But no light showed in those eyes; they were as blank as those of a fish.

"You are safe now, friend," said Pedro. "Lie still and rest, and you will soon be strong again." Then he turned to the men who had crowded into our house after us.

"Do not stand idle!" he commanded. "Do you not see that he is naked and starving? Meldo, your woman is a good cook—go at once and have her make some broth. You others, go to Joaquim's store and get more brandy—this is gone. And bring clothes."

They went, all except Domengos Peixoto, a surly sot whom nobody liked. I asked him what he waited for, and he answered that there was no sense in rushing about for a man who would soon be dead. This angered us both. Pedro roughly grabbed him and shoved him toward the door, and I kicked him out into the water. He scrambled out, got into his *montaria*, and went away cursing.

AFTER he was gone, though, we had to admit that he probably was right when he said this man would not live. Not only was he at the point of death from sickness and suffering and starvation, but he was crazed. Staring straight ahead, he was whispering and muttering, and his look of fear was even stronger than before.

We bent over him, listening. His talk was broken and confused. The terrible mud was dragging him down, he said. The jungle was black, black, and a jaguar was snarling under his tree. A huge snake was coiled beside his canoe, and if he could kill it he would eat it, but he had no weapon. The *pium*s were a torment as bad as fire. Something with a long black tail was grinning at him. Oh for a machete or a rifle! These things, and many more, he mumbled.

"Poor fellow, he raves of the terrors of the unknown jungle where he has been," said Pedro. I nodded, for I too had seen men whose brains were twisted by hardship. But before I could answer, the man screamed out:

"The tailed men! The tailed men! Devils of hell, they—ah! Drop that knife! I will do it; I will do it; yes, yes, but put away that knife!"

He cringed and shivered miserably as he screeched.

"Have courage, comrade!" Pedro soothed. "We will protect you. There are no knives or—or tailed *demonios* here."

But the human wreck lay whimpering and moaning, and we could make nothing of his words. Then Meldo came hastening in with a bowl of hot broth, and the other men arrived with clothes and more brandy, followed by still more men who had come to see what was going on. We raised the sufferer in his hammock and began to feed him the soup.

The smell of that food seemed to give him strength, and he sucked it up so greedily that we had to restrain him from seizing it and burning himself. When it was gone we pulled shirt and trousers on him and laid him back. He grew stupid, like an animal which has starved and then gorged itself. Our hopes rose a little, for we thought he might sleep and gain power to live. So we drove every one out, and, though some would not go away but stayed outside in their boats, the house became quiet. We sat in the other hammock, silently waiting.

All that afternoon we waited. The sick man seemed not to sleep but to doze with eyes partly open. It was nearly night when he breathed deep and the eyes opened wide. As we rose and stood beside him we saw two things: that the gray shade of death was on him, but that he had become sane.

Under his matted black hair his eyes gleamed hollowly first at me, then at Pedro. A light came into his scarred face, and a weak smile grew on his bearded mouth.

"Pedro!" he whispered.

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My partner stared down at him.

"Yes, I am Pedro, friend," he said. "But I do not know you."

"Luis Pitta," breathed the other.

"Luis Pitta! *Deos meo!* Are you Luis?"

The dying man nodded slightly.

"Luis. I die."

He lay breathing a moment, then went on:

"I am glad—to die and be at peace. Keep away—Jurua."

"Luis Pitta!" repeated Pedro in a shocked tone. "Luis—Luis, old comrade, who has treated you so? You were a strong man, and now——"

Luis shivered. Fear shot back into his face. As he answered his voice rose to a scream.

"The tailed men! The black men with tails! The demons of the Jurua! O God, save me from——"

He went limp. His jaw dropped. He was dead.

Again I felt cold. From the door, where other men heard that awful cry, came a low mumble of whispers and exclamations. Over the dead man Pedro made the sign of the cross. Then he began making a cigaret, and his hands shook. When it was lighted he began pacing up and down. His face grew hard and his eyes burned. Stopping suddenly, he demanded—

"Who remembers Luis Pitta?"

Nobody answered. The men outside had left their boats and edged in at the door, where they stared at the dead man as if trying to remember him, but none seemed to know him. The name of Luis Pitta meant nothing to me either, so I kept silence.

"We were boys together in Santarem, long before we came into this cursed Javary country," said Pedro. "Luis went to work as a *seringueiro* at the rubber estate of Senhor da Costa on the Branco, while I worked for Coronel Nunes. I have not heard anything of him since two years ago, when a man of the da Costa *seringal* told me Luis had grown restless and homesick for the open *campos* and clean sandy beaches of Santarem, and, in the time of high-water, had left for the East. He intended to paddle through flooded lakes and channels until he reached the Jurua, go down that river to Fonteboa on the Solimoes, and there get an Amazon boat which would carry him home.

"He was a strong, merry-hearted, fearless man, was Luis. Now look at him! A broken, tortured, fear-ridden wreck who raved of demons on the Jurua. *Por Deos!* Demons they are, the things which have done such work on my old comrade. But, demons or not, they shall pay!"

He choked with rage and struck one fist hard into the other hand.

"Who will go with me?" he roared. "Who will go to the Jurua and fight these fiends? Luis was a *seringueiro* like ourselves. Who goes to avenge him?"

Still no one spoke. The men glanced at one another, stared at the dead Luis, shuffled their feet, but made no answer.

"Pah! You sicken me!" Pedro growled. "You are not men of the bush, but pot-bellied town loafers. Get out! The air around you stinks!"

Then up spoke a man shamed by my partner's scorn.

"Pedro, you are mad. From the mouth of the Javary to the mouth of the Jurua is more than four hundred miles, and from there to the upper reaches of that river is at least six hundred. Shall we go a thousand miles to avenge a man we did not know? No. And this man Luis said the ones who broke him were devils—*demonios* with tails! Any of us will fight men, but we will not go far away to attack things spawned in hell. So long as they stay where they are we will let them alone."

The others grunted their approval of this. After glaring at them a moment, Pedro slowly nodded.

"You have it right," he admitted. "This is not your business. What is more, I do not want any of you now. If you would travel a thousand miles to get to a place that can be reached by paddling a hundred miles in another direction, you have not brains enough to be worth taking with me. I will go alone."

He motioned for them to leave the house. They went, shaking their heads and saying he was crazed. Then he turned to me, and found me squinting down the barrel of my rifle.

"I am not asking you to go either," he told me.

"You do not need to," I said. "Where is the oil? This barrel is rusty again."

He laughed out suddenly.

"Good old Lourenço! I should not have said that. The oil is there behind that *cuya*. But first let us bury Luis while it is yet day. We have not much time."

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AFTER some difficulty, we found a place where the dead man could be laid at rest. Then we went to the store, where we found men growling because we had buried Luis so quickly instead of burning candles over him all night and giving the townsmen an excuse to sit up and get drunk, as is usual when some one dies. They hushed, though, when we gave them hard looks and then bought many cartridges.

"Are you indeed going on this wild trip of which men talk?" asked Joaquim, the trader. When we said we were, he added:

"Then talk with my old father, who traveled much in his younger days and knows something of the Jurua. You will find him in the family-room behind that door."

In the room to which he pointed we found an old man lying in a hammock and smoking a long pipe.

"Greetings, *compadre*," said Pedro. "We go to the Jurua. Joaquim says you can tell us something of that river."

The old man blinked up at us, took out his pipe, and cleared his throat.

"And so I can, my sons," he answered. "What do you seek on the Jurua?"

"We know not, father, whether we seek men or beasts or demons; they may be all three. We would find things with tails which have tortured my old friend Luis Pitta. The tailed men of the Jurua, he called them."

"*Si*. I have heard of the death of Luis."

He began puffing again, gazing through the smoke as if seeing something far off. We said no more, but waited. After a time he spoke again.

"The Jurua is bad. It is long and more crooked than a snake, and on its banks live evil things. I would advise you not to go there, but I see that your eyes are hot and your heart burns for your friend, and I am not so old that I have forgotten my own youth. You will go. But I hope, my sons, that you will not find those things you seek, for if you do you may not come back.

"I have not seen those *demonios*, but I have heard of them. They are far up the river and they are beasts which walk like men. To reach them by going up the river would take many days and you might not live to enter their country, for the Arauas would murder you if they could. These Arauas live eight days' journey from the Solimoes and they are not to be trusted.

"There are also the Catauxias, but these are not so bad. Above these were the Canamaris, but the Canamaris have nearly died out through war with the Arauas. And much farther up are the Culinos and Nawas, of whom I know little, for it takes two moons to reach their region from the Amazon. Above all these are the Uginas. They are the tailed men.

"Yet you can avoid the tribes lower down the river, and shorten your journey to the Ugina country, by paddling up the Tecuahy and following a *furo* to the south."

"That was our plan," Pedro nodded. "I know there is a *furo*, but I do not know where it begins."

"It is in the Red Jungle. Far up the Tecuahy you will find it—a great forest of *massaranduba* trees. Soon after you have entered it you will see opening at the left a long *enseada*. Go into this bay and you will find it narrowing to a *furo* which will run almost straight for a time and then will become more winding. Where it ends I do not know, but it leads toward the land of the tailed *demonios*. *Adeos*, my sons. Go with God."

As we strode out Pedro turned and looked back at him. And when we got into our canoe he said:

"There, Lourenço, is the first real man I have seen this day, except yourself. Did you notice how his old eyes followed us when we came away? He has been an adventurer in his day, and even now he hungers to go with us. It is a pity he is so old and feeble."

Back to our *barracão* we went, stowed our equipment in our canoe, cleaned our guns, curled up in the hammocks, and slept. As soon as the black night turned to gray day we rolled out again, ate, and started.

DAYS of paddling followed. On our first night out we found ourselves very tired, for the loafing at the town had softened us and shortened our wind, and the next morning we were sluggish and stiff. After that, though, our muscles hardened, and we swung along at a stroke that put the miles steadily behind us. We talked little, for Pedro brooded on the fate of his old friend Luis, so that for a time he was not the light-hearted fellow I had usually found him. He did not seem like himself again until we reached the Red Jungle.

Late on a day of rain we found it. The dense green wall of jungle along the banks of

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the Tecuahy thinned out. Then the huge reddish trunks of *massarandubas* began to slide past us, their lofty crowns matting together so thickly that they seemed to make a solid roof. Soon we were in the midst of them. To right and left and up ahead they towered out of the flood-waters. Through them we paddled on fast, looking to the left. And before long, as the father of Joaquim had told us, a long *enseada* opened out toward the southeast.

In among the giant trees we pushed until we reached a hill where we could land. There Pedro took from the canoe his *machadinha*—the little hatchet which we use in tapping rubber-trees—and cut into a big trunk until milk came pouring out. As you know, *senhores*, the *massaranduba* is a "cow-tree," and its milk is good to drink if taken fresh, though it soon thickens to a tough glue if exposed to the air. We were hot and thirsty, and each of us drank a cupful of milk. Then, much refreshed, we made camp between the root-walls of that tree and ate our evening meal.

Though the day had not quite ended when we finished, it was very dark under that thick roof of branches and leaves. But the rain had stopped, and now the low sun suddenly flashed out, shooting its long rays in from the bay and making the wet reddish trunks glow like dull fire.

"This is a solemn place," I said, gazing at the great columns standing out against the farther gloom. "It seems weird and unnatural. No Indians would ever live in such a place; they would believe it to be the home of the Caypor, that great jungle-demon with the flaming red hair."

He nodded and opened his lips to answer. But no words came. His eyes widened, then narrowed, as if a strange thought had come to him, and he looked sharply at the nearest tree. I looked too, but saw nothing odd.

"What is it?" I asked.

"The women—" he said slowly, "the women of the *caboclos* make red dye from the bark of the *massaranduba*."

"Yes. But what of that?"

Still he studied the tree. Then, for the first time since Luis Pitta came floating down the river, he laughed. But why he laughed he would not tell. So, knowing him well, I asked no more questions.

As suddenly as it had come, the sun left us. At once it grew so black that we could see nothing at all. Tree-frogs and crickets burst out into their usual nightly hammering. Their racket made us feel more at home here, and we soon slept.

In the morning we drank again of the tree-milk, and before we left the hill Pedro cut off chunks of the rough *massaranduba* bark. These he stowed away in the canoe. Seeing my questioning look, he grinned.

"Perhaps I will make a red dye and paint the tails of the Uginas with it," he joked. "Who knows?"

"If we find them, I think we will paint them with red from their own veins," I replied.

His face hardened, and he grunted agreement. We left the hill, paddled away through the trees to the open water, and went on until we found the *furo*.

In the next three days we journeyed far and fast. The *furo* was narrow, but straight and deep, and there was neither current nor low-hanging bush to hold us back. The Red Jungle still rose around us, and its thick roof prevented the usual small stuff from growing around its trunks. In the dim shadows among those tremendous trees we saw no living thing, and heard no sound except that of frogs and bugs.

Then the big trees ended, and again we met the tangle of undergrowth and hanging vines. Here we had to travel more slowly. In some places we had to use poles instead of paddles. Snakes dropped down around us from branches overhead. Swarms of *piums* and *motucas* attacked us and bit until blood dripped from us. At night we heard jaguars roaring near by, and once we had to sleep almost buried under our supplies to protect ourselves from vampires. But we made good speed along the narrow canal in the daytime, and at length we shot out into a clay-colored water which at first we took for the Jurua.

We soon learned, however, that this was not even a river. It had a slight flow, but it was only a winding maze of flood-waters in which we wandered for days. And in this wandering we lost the *furo*. When we found that we were not on any river we sought it again but could not find it. But we did find a small river flowing in from the south, and up that stream we went.

BEFORE we had gone far on this river we were attacked. Shrill yells sounded in the bush, and arrows dropped around our boat. We snatched our rifles, but could see no men—only the heavy

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arrows rising slowly from the farther shore, curving in air and plunging straight down. Several struck in the canoe.

"Drop as if you were hit," snapped Pedro. Even as he spoke an arrow fell down my back, scratching my shoulder muscles and catching in my shirt. I slumped forward, thinking that now I was a dead man in truth—for if that arrow was poisoned I could not live long. A second later Pedro gave a groaning cry and flopped backward.

At once the arrows stopped. The yells became screeches of savage joy. We lay quiet, our boat drifting downward, until Pedro gave the word. Then we popped up and found naked wild men in plain sight on the bushy bank. Before they realized we were alive our bullets were striking them down.

At the belch of our guns they screeched again—this time from fear. They jumped away, but not before three of them had fallen dead and a fourth had tumbled into the river. We slammed several more bullets into the jungle, and heard their yelps grow fainter as they fled. Then I yanked that arrow out of my shirt and looked at its point. There was no stain of poison on it, and so the scratch across my shoulders meant nothing.

"Let us get that man," said Pedro, and I saw that the Indian who had fallen into the water was alive and trying to crawl out. We drove the canoe at him, caught him, and dragged him in. Then we crossed the river again and hung to bushes while we questioned him.

He had been shot in one leg but he paid no attention to the wound. He was more afraid of what we might yet do to him than of what we had done. His face was dull and stupid but his beady eyes showed his fear. We took care that he should keep on fearing us and tried to make him talk.

It was hard to make him understand. We spoke in Tupi, the *lengoa geràl* of the Amazonian Indians, but he seemed to know only a few words of it. From this we judged that he belonged to one of those small tribes often found far away from the Amazon, who have lived in one place so long they have almost forgotten the language of others.

Yet we learned a few things. We had been attacked because we were strangers, and these people feared all strangers. They would not assail us again, because now they would be too much afraid of our guns. The river we were following came out of a chain of swamps, and at the other end of that chain another stream ran south. This was what we most wanted to know, for it meant that we were on a route that would bring us out on the Jurua. We tried to find out something about the tailed men, but he could not or would not understand; he seemed to think we spoke of monkeys. So, having learned all we could from him, we let him go.

Back across the river we took him and put him out on the bank, knowing the others would find him there when they came back for their dead. Then we continued up the stream.

Our prisoner had told the truth; perhaps he was too stupid to lie to us. At the head of the river we came into great dismal *lagos*. After crossing these dead waters we found a flowing current which took us down another small stream to the south. This widened into a good-sized river, and at length it carried us out into a big, slow, dark water which was wider than anything we had seen since leaving Remate de Males. We had reached the Jurua.

"'The Jurua is long and more crooked than a snake, and on its banks live evil things,'" said Pedro, gazing out across the dreary river. "So spoke the father of Joaquim. In truth, this looks to be an evil water. Now shall we go up or down? We do not know where Luis was held prisoner."

"Up," I judged. "We were told that these Uginas live higher up than the other tribes. And Luis, in escaping, would naturally go down the river so that the current would aid him. The place where he was held must be above here."

So we turned to the right and journeyed up the dark water.

For two days we found nothing. By day we stole along through flooded swamps, keeping near shore, watching the bush and listening. By night we hid our canoe and slung our hammocks at the top of some hill, lighting no fire. We shot no game, made no noise we could avoid, and slept lightly with our guns beside us. But we neither saw nor heard anything except the usual animal life.

Then came storm. The sky had been dull for days, and rain had fallen often, but not hard. Now, as we scouted along a steep bank rising several feet above us, Pedro stopped paddling and looked behind him. I too looked backward, finding that the sky was swiftly growing black. As we held our

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paddles there came to us a dull roar of wind.

At once we snapped into swift strokes, seeking an inlet. Before we found one the wind had struck us, and the storm-waves were slapping heavily against our boat. But as we sped onward the bank grew lower, and then a small cove opened. We swerved into it. As we tumbled out on shore the storm broke.

Blinding lightning, crashing thunder, and drowning rain came all at once. We dragged the canoe up as high as we could, then squatted beside a tree until the squall should pass. But it did not pass as soon as expected. The wind and the deluge of rain swept onward after a while, but the thunder and lightning continued. So we stayed where we were, our eyes nearly closed to lessen the glare of the light-flashes, and waited.

SUDDENLY I felt Pedro's hand on my wrist. His lips moved, but a roar of thunder swallowed his words. He had come out of his squat and was sitting straight up on his heels, and his eyes were wide open. Following his stare, I saw, peering at us from behind a tree, a face.

It did not move. It hung there as if it grew from the tree, and the swift lightning lighted it up time after time. It was the face of an animal, but yet the face of a man. Heavy black hair hung down over its low forehead. Little black eyes glimmered at us. The nose flared so that it seemd a snout. The thick lips were drawn back, and yellow teeth gleamed in a soundless snarl. The whole face was bestial—such a face as a man might see in a bad dream.

The rapid flicker of lightning suddenly stopped. With the end of that winking glare the jungle seemed black. Pedro pushed me, and I lost my balance and toppled sidewise. He shoved me again, and then I caught his idea—that we should move away from that spot. We crawled several feet, got behind a tree, and stood up with rifles cocked.

Another flash whitened the bush. We saw the beast-man again. He too had moved, though only a little. He had slipped out until his arms and shoulders were clear of the tree, and he held a bow with the arrow aimed at the spot where we had been.

Though that space now was empty, he loosed the arrow before he realized we were gone. In the same instant he fell with two bullets through his head.

THE lightning vanished, but we jumped through the gloom to his tree. Beside it we found him huddled as he had fallen. While other flashes came and went we squatted there, peering around to learn whether this man had companions. Seeing none, we dragged him out to the canoe.

There we looked him over. We had dropped him face upward, and we saw that he was small, scrawny, filthy, and totally naked. Now Pedro took one arm and flopped the body over. We both recoiled.

"*Deos meo!*" cried my comrade. "It is true! Look! The tail!"

Yes, *senhores*, that dead man-animal had a tail. It was a long, naked, blackish tail like that of a great rat. It was not a thing fastened to him by rods or glue, either, but a real tail that grew from his body. And in spite of the dying screams of Luis Pitta, in spite of what the father of Joaquim had said of the Uginas, the sight of that bare, repulsive thing hanging from the dead man struck us dumb.

We stood staring at it until Pedro stooped, grasped it, and lifted. The body rose from the ground and dangled in air like that of a monkey. Dropping it, my partner rubbed his hands on his breeches as if to get rid of a snaky feeling.

The thunder died to a dull mutter before we spoke again. Then Pedro said:

"We have sent one of Luis' *demonios* down the road to hell. But yet this thing is no demon. It is hardly more than a *bicho do mato*—a beast of the forest. Either of us could kill two of these creatures at once with our bare hands. I wonder that a strong man like Luis let such things overcome him."

"They must have caught him asleep, or trapped him in some way," I reasoned. "And any one man, no matter how strong, can be overpowered by many others. You know how it is when we meet a horde of ants—we can crush a score of them at one step, but the others will swarm upon us and bite us horribly. And an ant is a tiny thing compared to this brute."

"True," he agreed. "I should not have spoken so of Luis. Let us see how bad the bite of this misbegotten creature would be."

We went over to the arrow sticking in the

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ground, pulled it up, and examined it. It was poorly made and had no barb, seeming to be only a straight stick with one end badly notched and the other fire-hardened and scraped to a point. Looking closely at that point, we could find no sign of poison.

"They are so ignorant that they do not know how to make poison," said my partner. "Yet we must not make the mistake of holding them too lightly. This arrow was shot hard enough to kill one of us. And no doubt they are cunning, like an alligator or any other low beast. Ah, the sun shines again. Let us see where this man came from."

As he said, the sun had blazed out. By the new light we went back to the tree where the man-beast had lurked, and there we found a few more arrows and his bow. The bow was as poorly made as the arrow we had inspected, but was strong enough to kill. Working away from the tree, we sought a path, but found none. In the mud, however, we spied the tracks of the dead man's feet. This trail we followed back through the bush.

It was not easy to track his course, for the foot-marks were few and scattered, and he seemed to have rambled in a winding, purposeless way. But when we lost it we always managed to find it again, and gradually it led us back some distance from the river.

We judged that he had been hunting, for we found spots were he had stopped and stood, making several marks in one place as he shifted his feet. On and on we crept, watching everything, saying nothing, until we came into what seemed a very faint path. There the wet earth was pressed down more firmly, and by looking along its edges we found a few marks of human toes.

ALONG this vague track we went with our heads up, glancing at the trail only now and then to make sure we did not lose it. All at once I stopped and threw up my rifle. Ahead of us a dark shape was swinging down a long vine hanging from high branches.

But I did not shoot. The moving thing was only a big monkey. It showed no fear of us, but came down until it could get a good view of us. There it stopped, gripping the vine with all four of its paws and swinging slowly, watched us. We stood still, staring back. After a time it climbed deliberately up again until it reached the tangle of limbs. Then we saw it go jumping and swinging away through the trees.

"He goes toward the place where this path leads," whispered Pedro.

"A pet monkey, perhaps," I guessed.

"Perhaps."

He smiled oddly, then motioned for me to go on.

We advanced for some distance before we saw or heard anything more. Often we stopped to listen; and it was at one of these still moments that we caught a sound ahead —a low mutter like a man's voice. At once we slipped aside into some thick bush and squatted.

Soon we heard a slight rustle of leaves. Then a man came stealing past. Another followed, and another—four in all. They might have been brothers of the one we had killed on the river-bank, for each had the same low, brutal sort of face. I thought I saw tails too, but could not be sure, for their bodies were partly hidden by the undergrowth. All were armed with bows and arrows, and all were peering ahead as if hunting something.

When the last man had passed I started to creep foward, intending both to look after them and to see whether more were coming. But I stopped where I was. High up over us broke out a noise.

Glancing upward, I saw the big black monkey which had watched us and gone away. He was hanging from a branch, looking down at us and chattering loudly. Low grunts came from the path where the savages had disappeared.

"Do not shoot!" whispered Pedro. "Use your machete!"

Silently we drew our bush-knives. With our legs tensed under us, ready for a spring, we waited. In the path a man reappeared, scowling into the tangle on both sides of the trail. On his heels crept another. Before we saw the other two, the first man spied us.

The instant his eyes met ours we leaped up and at him. My machete chopped him across the neck, and as he reeled I heard the cutting crunch of Pedro's heavy knife killing the savage next to him. Clutching my man about the body, I swung him around as a shield as I faced the two left alive. It was lucky that I did this, for one of those *barbaros* had drawn an arrow to its head, and now he shot. The arrow plunged into the body I held. Throwing the dead man from

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me, I jumped at my enemy and, before he could put another arrow to the bow, struck him down. Then I turned toward the fourth man.

He was stabbing at Pedro. My comrade jumped back like a cat, and his red machete whirled up sidewise against the other's wrist. A snarling grunt sounded in the throat of the Ugina. His knife flew aside. An instant later his whole body rose from the ground as Pedro drove his machete into his stomach and lifted.

A short, gasping wail burst from him. After Pedro threw him to the ground he writhed a moment, then lay still. We looked all around us, but saw no other man. Except ourselves, the black monkey overhead was the only living thing in that place.

We kicked the dead men over on their faces. Each had a tail.

"Four more gone to whine to Luis for forgiveness," said Pedro grimly, as he wiped his machete on a leaf. Then he stood scowling thoughtfully at the one he had just killed.

"He had a knife," he went on. "I chopped his bow, and then he drew— See! He wears a belt! A black leather belt and a knife-sheath! Where could such an animal get a knife, belt, and sheath? Where is that knife?"

Searching the undergrowth, we found it. It was long, with a sharp point and an odd handle—a handle of white bone, carved to fit the hand, with a knob at the upper end.

"It is as I thought," said Pedro, nodding. "This is Luis' own knife. I remember it well. It is a North American knife, and was given him by a man from Nova York who stayed for a time at Santarem collecting birds and insects for a great *museo*. He was very proud of it, for there was not another like it on the Amazon. Poor Luis!"

"These are the fiends who tortured him. This one must be the very man who cut him with his own knife—the one of whom he screamed as he died. I am sorry I did not know it sooner, for then this beast would have died more slowly."

He glowered down at the dead Ugina. Then he plucked big leaves from the bush, wrapped up the knife, and tied the bundle with bush-cord.

"I do not want the belt and sheath, now that this vile creature has worn them," he said. "But the knife Luis loved so well shall stay with me. Now let us throw these brutes out of the way."

We did so. After that Pedro turned back toward the river.

"Come," he said, "I have a plan which is better than going straight ahead now. And we had best get more cartridges."

It was not until then that I realized we carried no cartridges except those in the magazines of our rifles. So, picking our guns from the undergrowth where we had hidden them, we returned as we had come. We took no care to conceal our trail, for our feet were bare and made no strange marks in the path.

In the river-bank Pedro stopped short, staring at the ground.

"Lourenço!" he muttered. "We killed that *demonio*, did we not?"

I looked for the dead man. He was gone.

OUR canoe was there, and nothing in it had been touched. There was no sign that other men had come while we were away. The bush around us was silent and empty. Yet that tailed thing with the top of its head blown off had disappeared.

The sun had gone under clouds again, and the light was dim. Stooping, we scanned the ground where the Ugina had lain. Then we saw signs that something had been dragged from the spot. The signs led toward the water. In the mud at the edge of the water was the trail of a big alligator.

"Ah, that is more natural," Pedro said in a relieved tone. "I was almost ready to believe that the man-devil had stuffed his brains back into his head and walked off. I think I am losing my own brains. Let us go somewhere else for the night. It is too late to do anything more today."

So we left the inlet, paddled back downstream, crossed to the other side of the river, and camped there.

As you may suppose, we argued that night about the tailed men. We agreed that they were not much more than animals, but the question was how they got tails. They might be monkeys turning into men, or they might be men becoming monkeys; but still they did not seem monkey-like, except that they were hairy and had the tails and faces of brutes. Their feet were the big flat feet of men, not monkey paws; and their tails seemed useless. Finally Pedro said:

"The things of which we are sure are that

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they have tails and that they are vile and cruel. They have no human hearts. And my idea about them is that they are men, but so low that they breed with monkeys.

"You remember the *barbaros* who attacked us before we passed through the swamps, and what a stupid fellow that one was whom we caught. He was not much higher than these Uginas, though he had no tail. You know how some of these small tribes who live in one place breed among themselves until their brains become hardly better than those of animals. They sink lower and lower until they are beasts, living only to eat and sleep and do vicious things. And you remember that black monkey we met, which looked at us and then brought those four men to seek us. He was a *coaita*, the tallest and most knowing monkey in our jungles—you have seen *coaitas* kept as pets along the Solimoes. Why, then, should a tribe so low as these Uginas not breed with *coaitas*? And why should not that breeding give them tails?"

"Who knows where men came from in the first place? Who knows whether the first men on earth did not have tails? If they did, would it be strange that such people as these, by mixing with monkeys, should grow them again? Lourenço, I think this is the true reason why these tailed men exist.

"I believe that *coaita* who spied on us was not only a pet, but a blood-brother—or perhaps a father—to some of those creatures who came to hunt us! And I believe that when we enter their town—if they have a town—we shall find other *coaitas* there."

"You may have it right," I admitted. "Now that I think of it, I remember something I once heard said by a college professor from North America—Senhor Grayson, who stayed at the *coronel's* place for a time to study jungle creatures, and whom we named the Jabiru because he looked so much like that bird.

"He said there had been a time, far back in the early days, when men lived in trees like monkeys. He did not say they had tails, or even that men and monkeys ever were the same. But it they lived like monkeys perhaps they were like monkeys in other ways—I do not know any reason why they should not be.

"But the question now is not so much where these men got their tails as what we shall do to them tomorrow. What is your plan?"

"My plan now is to sleep," he said. And sleep he did, so that I could do nothing but wonder a while and then sleep also.

In the morning Pedro made the first fire we had lighted since reaching the Jurua. The place where we had slept was up a narrow creek concealed by thick bush, and we could find no sign of human life near it. My partner set water to heat in a cooking-vessel, broke up the *massaranduba* bark he had cut in the Red Jungle, and put that also into the pot. Then, leaving me to watch the fire, he went away.

He was gone for some time. When he returned he brought an armful of light-colored strips of thin bark and a number of small springy withes. While I kept the water boiling he untied the knife of Luis, which was more thin of blade than his machete, and with this he shredded the light bark into fibers hardly bigger than hairs.

At this work he spent most of the forenoon. When it was done we pulled the boiled chunks of *massaranduba* bark from the pot. The water in that vessel now had become a red dye. Into this we stuffed the hairy fibers, leaving them in until they became red, then taking them out and putting in others, until at last all were dyed.

All this time I had asked no questions, for Pedro had plagued me many times in the past when I sought reasons for what he did, and had always found that behind his actions was an idea. But now I could no longer keep still.

"If it is not a great secret," I said, "may I ask what you are making?"

"Hair," he grinned. "Red hair. Is it not beautiful?"

"It is red enough, if any one loves red hair. But what has this to do with killed tailed men?"

"I am surprized that you have not guessed it," he mocked. "We shall make ourselves so handsome that when the Uginas see us they will drop dead from admiration."

I SAID no more. When he took some spare clothing and rubber-covered pack-sheets from the canoe, however, and began to shape them over withes bent and tied into the shape of a large head, I caught his idea. Back came the memory of my idle remark in the Red Jungle about that demon of the Indians—the Caypor. Now I saw why Pedro had

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brought along the red bark and why he made red hair. At once I went to work helping him.

Over the frameworks of springy branches we built up trunks, shoulders, and heads, weaving bush-cord through holes in the cloth and rubber and tying them into the right shape. Around the great heads we bound that red hair which we had just made. On the dark rubber we made awful faces, using bits of fungus, daubs of clay and streaks of red dye, and cutting slits for mouths, into which we fastened bits of wood like jagged yellow teeth. When we lifted the things and set them on our shoulders we became the most horrible monsters I have ever seen, except in nightmares.

We seemed misshapen giants whose arms grew from our waists, whose hair had been dyed in blood, and whose huge red-smeared mouths were stretching open ready to tear men into mangled corpses. Even a civilized man would have started with fear at first sight of us. And we believed that such low-brained creatures as the tailed Uginas would take us for real and deadly fiends.

Making sure that the frameworks fitted well over our shoulders and that the holes cut for our eyes would not slip aside and leave us blinded, we took them off again and emptied our canoe. After hiding our equipment where nothing could disturb it while we were away, we ate and smoked.

"Our arms are stained red from that dye," I said.

"They will be more red before we return," Pedro answered. And he spoke truth.

No rain was falling, but the light was poor. This suited us well. Carrying with us only those weird false bodies, full cartridge-belts, and our weapons, we slipped the canoe down the creek to the river, crossed over, and stole along up the northern bank until we reached that little inlet where we had shot the first Ugina. A short scouting-trip proved that this time no enemy lurked there. So we bound on our terrible masks, looked again at our rifles to make sure they were full, and took the trail toward the lair of the tailed men.

We soon found that, though our towering masks were not heavy, they were awkward and uncomfortable. Before long we were dripping with sweat, and we had to walk in a stooping posture and step carefully to keep our false heads from butting against low branches.

But we knew that unless the Uginas lived in different fashion from all other tribes their village would be in a cleared space, and there we could stand erect. We knew, too, that they probably would be dozing now, for it was midday and the muggy air was sweltering hot. Our plan of attack was very simple—to walk in among them and start shouting.

At the place where we had hidden yesterday and fought the four men led by the monkey, we found signs that other men had been there since we left. The bush was beaten aside and broken, and fresh foot-marks showed in spots where the soil was soft. Though we stayed in the path, we knew the bodies which we had thrown aside had been found and taken away.

"We had best go slowly," I advised, "or we may fall into a trap. They must be hunting us, now that they have found those bodies."

But he snorted.

"You forget that we are demons," he objected. "Who ever heard of a demon slinking along cautiously? We must go in with a roar. If a few lurk in ambush, they will run when they see us. And I do not believe they are waiting for us,—they have no reason to expect us to return, and it is so hot now that they are probably sleeping in their dens."

He was not wrong. We saw no man until we opened our fight. Abruptly the jungle ended and we emerged into a clearing. Trees grew there, but they were few and large and scattered, and the smaller growth had been hacked or burned away. We saw no houses of any kind. Surprized by this, we halted.

Then out rang a scream, so near us that we jumped. From the base of a huge tree close at hand sprang a naked figure which ran shrieking down the open space. We threw up our rifles, but did not shoot; for the long hair flying out behind that form showed it was a woman. Later I remembered that she was not a tailed creature. Now we glanced at the place whence she had jumped, and saw that it was a tangle of sticks with a door-like hole in it.

Out through that hole scrambled two other figures. One was a big *coaita*, which looked at us and then fled up into the tree. The other was a squat, scared-looking beast-man who rose to his knees and threw a spear at us. Pedro's rifle barked, and the Ugina flopped on his face.

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Then we saw the others. From the butts of those big trees they came popping out like ants. The woman was still running, still screaming, and as they saw us they too began to jabber and yell. In our deepest tones we roared an answer. Then, our guns spitting death, we advanced on them.

For a moment it seemed that they would run for the jungle. I hoped they would stand and fight, for I would dislike to shoot even such beasts as these in the back. But I need not have troubled about that. They ran only to get weapons. If they had known we were merely men they probably would have swarmed on us. As it was, they bunched around their trees and shot arrows and threw small spears, fighting as a beast fights—because he is too much scared to do anything else.

WE STOPPED before we came too close, bellowing as fiendishly as we could and moving from side to side while we reloaded our guns. Arrows fell around us, some striking fire-charred stumps and bouncing off, some slithering through the grass, some chunking down into pools of water. Many of these might have hit us if we had stood still, but by our irregular movements to the side we evaded most of them. Besides, the Uginas were shooting and throwing with the hurried aim of fear, and their spears fell short and their arrows flew high. No doubt those who took any aim at all shot for those terrifying false heads of ours. At any rate, the few missiles which hit us went into the hollow framework of our masks, leaving our own heads and bodies untouched.

Shooting swiftly but carefully, we poured another magazineful of lead into a knot of snarling savages around the butt of the nearest tree. Some yelped as they fell. Others dropped silently. One or two squirmed on the ground, then lay still. The note of terror in the yells of those still standing became sharper. And when, our guns once more emptied, we began advancing toward them as we reloaded, panic swept them into howling flight.

A couple of dropping arrows had caught in my shirt and stuck there, scraping my skin but doing no harm. From our false heads and shoulders several other arrows protruded. And the Uginas, seeing this and finding that we showed no signs of hurt, must have believed it was impossible to kill or even wound us. Yelling hoarsely, they turned and ran for the bush.

But it was only the first tree that was deserted. From the other butts more Uginas ran out and joined those seeking cover, but these seemed to be mostly women and children—or, perhaps, monkeys. The men stayed, bunching together and sending a few more arrows at us. One of these, falling slatwise, pierced my left foot.

I was glad then that those arrows had no barbs, for it was easy to pull out that one and throw it aside. I tried to do this carelessly, as if it did not hurt. But I must have shown some sign of pain—perhaps I had jumped when the shaft struck me—for the shouts grew louder and arrows came more thickly again. We paid no attention to these, moving on as if we scorned them until we came into the shelter of the big abandoned tree.

There, partly covered by the huge trunk, we shot steadily into the knots of savages around the other trees. We divided these between us, Pedro taking those to the left while I attacked those to the right. And now we did not concentrate on one spot alone, but shifted our fire from butt to butt, striking men down here and there so rapidly that it must have seemed we were killing the whole tribe at once. Yet the Uginas fought on, though their fight seemed to be weakening and their noise died down.

If they had known enough to keep quiet we might have died suddenly. Nothing had threatened our backs, and our enemies were in front, so that we never glanced behind. But now new cries began to come from the line of trees, and we saw the beast-men looking beyond us. Wheeling, we found several stealthy forms crawling up on us among the stumps.

They were on hands and knees, partly hidden by stumps and grass, but we could see their heads well enough. Into two of those heads I sent bullets. Then my hammer snapped down without an explosion. Dropping the empty gun, I yanked my machete and jumped at the rest of them.

But they did not wait. Their only weapons were short spears, and as we bore down on them they rose, threw their weapons, screeched, and ran for their lives. One just ahead of me fell over a stump, and another tripped over his outflung arms. I got both of them with slashing blows across the back of the neck. Pedro, too, caught one of the

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fleeing creatures and killed him, and later I found that he had shot another as he charged at them. Only two were left, and they went bounding away, howling fearfully.

WE TURNED back, sweeping the line of trees with our eyes to see whether other Uginas meant to rush us. But none did. Instead, more were sneaking for the bush.

"My cartridges are running low," said Pedro, as we reloaded. "Let us advance on them before we use up all our bullets."

With our deepest yells we left our tree and advanced at a trot. The beast-men could stand no longer. A few sprang out from each butt and fled. The rest wavered an instant and followed. Halting, we shot fast and straight, downing several more of them. Then the clearing was empty.

"Now that they have quit, they will keep on running until they think themselves safe," said Pedro. "To help them on their way I will scream a little."

And scream he did, horrible wailing screams that sounded as if some wounded man were being torn apart and devoured by those yellow teeth in our false faces. They made me cold, even though I knew who made them and why. And the fear-ridden fugitives must have fled deep into the bush on hearing them, for we saw none of them again.

Roaring and screaming by turns, we passed along the line of big trees, seeking any living thing that might remain. We found only two. In the doorway of one of the miserable hovels built between the root-buttresses we spied a wounded savage. As we stepped toward him he gave one snarl of terror, lifted a spear, and plunged it into his own heart. In another hut we found a sick *coaita* monkey which squatted and watched us without moving. Nothing else was under those trees except bodies.

Some of the dead men, we noticed, had no tails. But, tailed or tailless, all had the same brute faces. We paid little attention to them, except to make sure they were dead and could not kill us from behind. When we reached the end of the open space we stopped yelling and stood looking at each other.

Pedro's mask was pierced in several places, and one arrow jutted out only a few inches from his eyes.

"Are you hit?" I asked.

"No. This arrow scraped my head and may have torn my scalp, but it is nothing. Your foot-wound is much worse than that. Let us finish our work and go."

Out from a pocket he drew a small package carefully wrapped in rubber, and from this he produced matches. We pulled a few dry sticks from inside the stinking hut nearest us and set fire to them. Soon we had all the shelters around that tree going up in smoke. Then we passed back as we had come, firing the filthy hovels until each tree was ringed with flame.

After leaving the tree where we had made most of our fight we stopped a moment to look down at the bodies of those whom we had shot while they were creeping up on us from behind. They lay face down, and they were tailless and had long hair.

"*Nossa Senhora!*" exclaimed Pedro. "They are women!"

I shoved one over with my foot. It was true. The other two whom we had shot were women also. Their faces were as vile and their bodies as scraggy as those of the men, but women they were. Wondering whether the others also had been females, we went on and looked at the three whom we had killed with our machetes. We found them to be men.

"That explains it," nodded Pedro. "I wondered how they dared to come so near us. The women were the leaders. Perhaps we had killed their mates. The men had sense enough to fear us, but a woman crazed with fury loses all fear and all sense. I am glad we did not fall alive into their hands."

Remembering the scarred body of Luis Pitta and looking into the faces of those she-devils, I grunted agreement.

We left them there and went our way. At the edge of the bush, where the faint trail began, we turned and looked back. The dismal clearing, with its blackened stumps and its few gaunt trees, now was blue with low-crawling clouds of smoke through which glared the belts of flame eating up the habitations of the *bichos do mata*. Around those fires, we knew, lay the bullet-torn corpses of many tailed creatures who never again would torture a prisoner. The jungle around us was empty and silent, and the only sound was the sullen crackle of the fires. We had come as demons to fight demons, and we left behind us a death-strewn hell. Our work was done.

Back along the vague path we passed to

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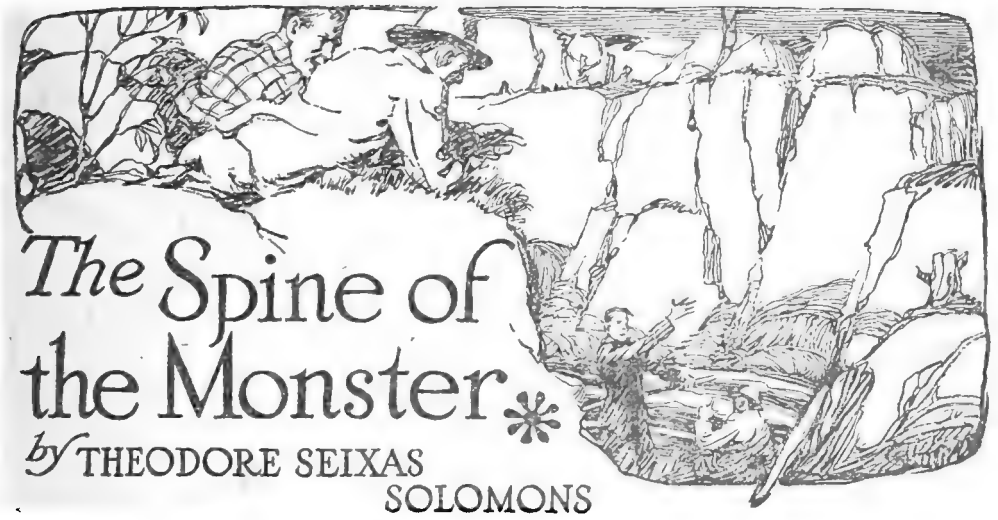
the river. There we cut off our monstrous disguises, pitched them into the canoe, and breathed deep of the damp air.

"Luis, old comrade, we have done our best for you," Pedro said soberly. "So far as two men could destroy these fiends we have destroyed them; and into the others we have put fear that will abide. Now sleep in peace, Luis *meo*."

And we got into the canoe and paddled away toward the creek where our supplies were hidden.



The Spine of the Monster*

by THEODORE SEIXAS SOLOMONS

Author of "In the Maw of the Ice," "Staggering Steve," etc.

IT WAS amateur night, or rather day, at the greatest show on earth. Its features were decidedly novel, and it was a continuous performance, an all-daylight affair. It was enacted in the open air, on a moving stage, in neither city, town nor village. It had been going on for a week or two, and each day was amateur day, though there were a few professionals taking part in it. The numbers were very short and followed each other quickly, with only a few chance intermissions.

Each feature of the program was impromptu, unconscious, and, whether comic or tragic, a thriller. No number, of the several hundred enacted each day, was ever repeated; and to him who could appreciate it, the show was easily worth a thousand dollars. The price of admission was nothing.

I had come early with my two partners, and in the auditorium, which consisted of one long row, we had choice seats, or places, rather, for we did not sit. We lay prone—not on our backs, but our fronts. A rock worried my abdomen for hours, I suppose; but I was not aware of it until I arose, and then I became satisfied I had contracted some rapid and fatal kind of appendicitis. Also, the back of my neck was virtually paralyzed. Its muscles had been holding my head out over the edge, and Heaven only knows how they had managed to do it all that time. "Spectators' necks" must have been a common affliction in that locality during the month of June, 1898.

I enjoyed that show more than all the other shows I had seen and have since seen in my life put together. One harrowing regret curdles the retrospect. It was before the days of movies, and I could not film the spectacle and laugh at Rockefeller.

But even at the time, there was a fly in the ointment of its fascination—I, too, must join the procession of amateurs and take my chances of the "hook," which in this case was one or another of various "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," mostly wet ones, which the Miles Cañon and White Horse Rapids held for the unlucky or unskilful Klondiker of those days. Not now. There is a nice little railroad around them now.

** This is an Off-the-Trail Story. See first contents page.*

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The greatest show on earth we've called it ever since we bellied cautiously to the brink of the basalt gorge and looked over and down. It was the unanimous verdict.

TWE HAD finished building our scow, Howard, Bodkins and I, and after picking up a fourth man, a curious little hobo named Jeff, we left the cove on Lake Bennett—where we had watched Missou' snatch from the maw of the ice two very foolish and reckless human beings—and hoisted sail for the long run down to Dawson City.

Adventures in plenty befell us in our threading of the narrow lakes at the head of the mighty Alaskan river; storms and calms and sand-bars, with which our pristine ignorance of boats and boatcraft strove and tussled, the clumsy old scow, with its long bow and stern sweeps and square tarpaulin sail being the worried victim.

And each day we drew nearer and nearer to the great impediment of the Yukon, the thing we had read and heard and been warned of; the thing some feared, some pooh-poohed. Based beyond doubt in a geographical fact, yet fabled in song and story and legend of the old Yukon pioneers, we of the greedy horde approached that twin bogey with a curious mixture of skepticism and dread.

After Marsh Lake, only a stretch of river, so our rude map asserted, lay between us and the famous gorge. Down that reach of river we floated, and when, late in a long evening, we began to doubt the very existence of the place and were thinking of supper and blankets—suddenly, on the curving right bank, we caught sight of a seemingly endless succession of boats, moored close together, all slanting a little to the stream, for all the world like a string of automobiles parked obliquely to the curb of a busy street.

It meant only one thing—the cañon and rapids were upon us. Or we upon them, if you like. We added our scow to that line of motley craft and camped on the bank in the gathering dusk.

At dawn next morning—and dawn comes mighty early in that latitude—we rolled out, snatched a cold bite and, leaving Jeff to watch our outfit, footed it down along the rough bank path, stepping over mooring-lines every few paces and keeping that up for an interminable time. Boats! All the new-built, unpainted, small boats of the world seemed there, till, abruptly, with the sudden curving of the river to the left, the line of them ended, and not an eighth of a mile below, the old river narrowed, leaped sharply to the right again, and vanished between straight, basalt cliffs. Early as it was, there were two boats on their way to that gullet.

In the first turn were log houses of the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police, and numerous tents of pilots—as we afterward learned they were. These pilots, nondescript adventurers more or less familiar with swift water, had gathered here from the ends of the earth to make a grub-stake at a hazardous game. Canadian "white-watermen" predominated, a few of them being red-scarf-belted *voyageurs* of the Quebec and Montreal type, the rest hailing from the lumbering regions of the North woods. Later we learned to tell them. All wore some sort of piratical cap, and each jauntily carried on his shoulder his tool of trade, a carefully tested ash or hickory oar.

"How do you get down there to see what's going on?" one of us asked an early-rising pilot, a French-Canadian, evidently. He pointed around the corner of the farthest log building and told us:

"Thees portage trail she is ver' plain to the rapids. But," he added, "if you would look see the Mile' Cañon first, many thee trails string off through a beeg meadow of foot-high teember. She is 'bout mile from here."

He further told us, in answer to our breathless, curious questionings, that the boats had been moving through in great numbers for nearly a week.

"How many, you think?"

"Oh, by ——, a mill-eon," he replied, spitting contemptuously into the brush, as he turned his bacon.

Other "cheechalkas" were stirring about, bent on the same business as ourselves; and we hurried off to the portage trail, over the low, rounded slope of denuded forest. There wasn't a dry standing stick for miles about there—testimony enough to the many years of corduroy road-making and tramway building around the great impediment, of which the world knew nothing till the strike on the Klondike brought twenty thousand men to see what the handful of old pioneers had done.

Of the old tramway, used when time was

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less valuable than the small, infinitely precious outfits of the early voyagers, there were now only a few sadly decaying traces. But even had it been available still, it would have held up that feverish horde of fortune-seekers for ten years!

The average Klondiker of 1898 loved life. But a chance of death was preferable to delay; and the portage, which now portaged nothing, had become merely the logged-out space margining the great impediment on the eastern bank. It was "shoot 'em or get left," so everybody "shot 'em," alone or with a pilot, scared to death or confident, lucky or unlucky. Klondike gold waited for no man. We were all for ourselves, and the devil took the hindmost.

THE risen sun was at our backs when we turned off from the old tramway trail in the "foot-high teember" and followed the "stringing" paths to the brink of the gorge. Here was a true coign of vantage, in the very center of the cañon's length. The narrowest portion was below us, while on our right in the opposite wall was a rotunda-like expansion of the gorge, filled with a kind of whirlpool eddy. Then the cañon, again confining the river between close walls, turned sharply to the right for a space before debouching upon a low-banked channel, widening, and becoming again a fairly innocent river except for some treacherous rocks.

Good fortune led us to a jutting point in the wall, and when we had crawled to the edge and sprawled out upon the sod that capped the basalt to the very brink we looked almost perpendicularly upon the scene below us and—lost all track of time.

While we had been making this point in the cañon by the land-route, boat parties in quickly increasing numbers had been gaining it below us by the water-route, and the unique spectacle was fairly launched for another span of daylight. This is what we saw:

Horizontally across the chasm was turf again, with brush and scattering trees, just as upon our side; thence a slope, upward and away. In the ages gone, before this gorge was cut, here was a simple enough river-valley. But when the level of the Yukon became reduced, the mighty river routed the vertical cleavages of the basalt which had underlain this part of the valley, and the narrow, dark red-brown gorge called Miles Cañon resulted—a fissure of perhaps seventy-five feet in average width, through which there was forced to flow a river of clear water draining thousands of square miles of the snowy mountains of British Columbia and the Yukon Territory, with their great sea-like lakes and hundred streams—a river whose width and current, for the miles that we had pursued but one branch of it, had made it seem to us a volume of water so huge that we could not conceive it possible that it could hurl itself through this narrow, ditch-like channel.

Yet here it was—all of it. And I am sure that every man who saw it shared my thought that that gorge must be many times as deep as it was wide. I should have liked to sound it, but a glance would dissuade one from the attempt. A lead line, lowered to that continuous, fluid catapult, would have been whisked away before it could begin to pierce the surface.

We looked into the somber depths of the gorge. The eye did not take it in at first—not as a river. It was rather some sort of water structure in motion. The surface of a mass of water is flat, even on the ocean, where the waves fret it into a mere superficial roughness. The surface of this water was not flat; it was semi-cylindrical—a continuous, flexible, crystalline cylinder was lying on its side in the trench and writhing away through it with flashing speed.

To put it another way, the thing was humped up in the middle. It was a continuous, never ending spine or hogback of water. Even across the rotunda-like enlargement the prone cylinder maintained itself. It followed the straighter side—our side—merely throwing off an eddy into the roundish pocket of the rotunda. This was the "whirlpool," with, however, no downward-sucking propensity, or Heaven help the fellows who were occasionally marooned upon it!

This heaped-up water was not smooth. The spine of it was fretted with a swift, flashing, rippling skin that told of the stress of the underlying waters, freed at the surface to confront the slow-moving air.

The next impression I got—I am speaking only of the water now—was that it moved through the gorge as a single, organic, fluid body. So vivid, indeed, was one's sense of livingness that it really seemed to be a great water-snake—that is,

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a snake made of water, here wider, here narrower of girth, completely filling the gorge bottom, its upper, visible surface being thus the semi cylinder, writhing away with all the force and much more than the swiftness of motion of a boa-constrictor magnified to the size of this superleviathan monster.

And it was endless! The Yukon, forever entering the gorge, transformed itself into this reptilian, fluid colossus and forever glided through it, dissolving again at the lower end into mere flat, flowing water.

Except at the whirlpool there was no back-wash, no margin of plain, familiar water, dead or slowly moving backward, as in an eddy. The sinuous monster rubbed the walls, ever enlarging or contracting its instantly flexing body to fill the gorge full in its varying width, always at the same speed, always with the same hump, always with the same breathless, whizzing rush. You fixed your eye on a bit of the scaly fretwork of its surface, and followed it. It glided past under your eye, sweeping to the right farther, farther—and directly it was out of your sight. The endless snake had slithered that much onward.

It had an awful look of sinister, silent power. You felt that you might ride its unconscious back and get out below, but if you ever got into it you would be absorbed. Or, if it flung you to the wall, it would rub you out against it. If it rolled you beneath its long belly it would grind you to nothingness against the stone bottom of the trench.

These impressions of the water were gleaned over, among, and through the acuter impressions of the things that were happening upon its surface, for, as I say, the boats had come. The early morning sun, striking the smooth facets of the basalt of the upper part of the opposite wall, glanced downward glintingly upon them, flecking with weird lights and half-lights the astounding procession of the Argonauts through the shade of the gorge.

There they were, perhaps a hundred feet beneath our eyes. Not one looked up. Not one of those men—and women—most of whom had yesterday lain where we lay and peered as we peered, remembered it, or knew that here, in the cañon's center, was the place of watching.

They, all of them, saw nothing but the dark, smoothish basalt walls that were shooting past them backward, and most of them thought of nothing but one thing, one dreadful fear, upon which every faculty, every power was concentrated—that presently they must glide or slide down-hill to that rough wall as murderously back-flashing as rough ground beneath the platform steps of a swiftly moving train.

And we, leaning out over the cliff, enchantedly watching them, marveled that they did not slide off. A line of boats of every species and description, set at irregular intervals along the crest of that turnpike of water, stuck upon it as if cast into the liquid glass of it, moving not one inch in it or on it, were hurled with it through the gorge. Or—to prefer the other illusion—fixed like so many bony excrescences on the spine of the reptile, with it they glided past our down-staring eyes.

But the water, motionless to them, moved to us, bearing barges, dories, scows, canoes, skiffs and whaleboats, rafts and catamarans, filled or half-filled, manned by one, or twenty, or a varying few, human beings in every state of mind and emotion, in every attitude and posture, with every range of gesture and movement, from abject paralysis to wild gesticulation. Caught in the grip of a force endlessly the same in its process, the human phenomena were continually different; no two boatsful, no two boatmen, looked or behaved alike.

HERE came a clumsy, lake-made dory with five men and a woman. The two men on either side dipped oars in the water, moving them in short, strengthless strokes up, back, in; up, back, in; not seeing them, their gaze, half-terrified, half-fascinated, fixed only on the backward-flying walls at the bottom of the water-hill. The steersman, clutching his straight-out, motionless oar, looked ahead at the slow-curving water-hump and the swiftly flying cañon. The woman sitting in the bow smiled inanely and wagged her head from side to side.

Next a long, lumbering, square-ended barge, heaped along the center with canvas-covered outfit, oarsmen on either side, a sweepsman at either end, standing on the decked-over bow and stern—all intent on the marvel. These are stolid fellows, too ignorant, perhaps, to feel danger—though of danger there was little—too unimaginative to be conscious of anything except

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the supreme strangeness and novelty of the thing that appeared to be happening to them, till one of the oarsmen shouted something to the steersman—judging by his half-rising and moving his jaws under his hand, cupped like a trumpet.

It was then we made, each for himself, a curious discovery: We were deaf and dumb! A marvelous spell had gradually bound our ears as we approached the chasm in single file and, without speaking, had flung ourselves down and crawled to the brink. In silence we had watched till this man made his pantomimic shout; and I, being near enough to him to hear it, and not hearing it, shouted myself, and heard, purely by internal audition, only a kind of murmur in my head, and then I knew. The monster, swiftly gliding, frictionless in seeming, had diffused upon the air a sullen, fearful, all-pervasive roar, like another atmosphere of sound, within which lungs and larynx became a Lilliputian joke.

That barge, borne on the back of the leviathan, is whisked away; and the next sprocket in the monster's chain of armor claims our gaze. It is a very small protuberance—a canoe with three men, all paddling, all enjoying it, like men so accustomed to every feel and sensation of craft in water that only a Miles Cañon could evoke from them the tribute of a curiously interested attention. There was no pilot needed in that canoe.

Next swam into our view a long poling-boat, built for prospecting shallow rivers. With its insufficiently upcurved bow, God help it in the name of the White Horse! But we didn't know that then. Here in the cañon, however, all craft are alike, and alike are safe if you do not too strenuously tamper with the monster. These fellows did not. They were too stricken stiff with frightened wonder.

But the next slender boat—it was the slender ones that could be strenuously tampered with, thanks to their lines and lightness—got into trouble. The enterprising amateur at the steering-oar, fancying that he was not near enough to the exact summit of the ridge to be safe from a fatal downward glide, kept urging the oarsmen by gesture and soundless shouting to give him steerage way.

As the oars bent under their quick, powerful strokes—you could actually see the curve of the blades—he held her nose slantwise toward the crest and straightway was flung into the whirlpool eddy in the rotunda!

It was only because he was opposite that single bay—as it might be called—in the gorge's length that he managed thus to dismount the boa-constrictor's back. It was well-nigh impossible elsewhere, for the constricted waters drew mightily toward their crest. The fear of the walls was a natural but an illusory one; it was as difficult to row down that slope as it is to row up a steep rapid of an unpent river. One bent on suicide here could accomplish nothing, provided he stayed in his craft, were it but a tub.

But in the pocket of the west wall, known as the whirlpool, there was free water, eddying swiftly round and round—a wheel, turned by its contact with the belt-like current of the gorge. Under the headway of the oars, the slender poling-boat had got its nose into the beginnings of the neutral water, and the current had kicked it spinning into the eddy and left it to circle the whirlpool like a single carful in a merry-go-round.

Leaving these strenuous ones in their ill-deserved predicament, my eye returns to the hurtling throng of boats. Directly beneath is a small Peterboro canoe, a mere elongated cockle-shell borne on the mighty flood. Kneeling comfortably in the stern, his paddle between strokes resting lightly on the side, the single occupant of the canoe studies with a cool and casual eye his ever changing encompassment; yet not neglecting to keep his little craft straight with the current. Every other moment his eye returns to the canoe's bow, and a quick intwist of his paddle or a graceful outstroke keeps her trim. This fellow knows water.

Hard upon him is a lugubrious outfit in a short, flattish, keelless structure, a clumsy kind of blunt-nosed *bateau*. Something had set them spinning—themselves, no doubt—and though the sightless current cared nothing for this but bowled them along exactly as it handled the others, they were speechless with dismay; frozen in all postures of suspended animation, dizzy, open-mouthed, gasping with the expectation of some horrible fate. How natural was the terror of their vertigo. With their rotating boat seeming to stand still, those walls must have merged in a whirling dance and flown by them.

A great barge, a kind of freighter, chased

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that whirligig. Four men only manned her, two at each end, with sweeps twenty-five feet long, at least, with which they kept their barge lined to the current. A thousand to one they had shot the cañon and rapids many a time.

It was amazing that the speed of this great, weighty thing, at least eighty feet long, big of beam, and loaded high above the gunwale, was precisely that of the small, slender craft. But she was clenched in a might indifferent, insensible of tonnage. We had a greater instance of this presently.

Men said later that anything that could float—a chip as well as a dory—once well started in mid-channel at the cañon's entrance, must go through in midstream and in midstream be vomited at its mouth, willy-nilly. It mattered not what you were to do or try to do—except thrust over toward the rotunda. With that qualification the assertion was probably true. These sage ones ascribed what few catastrophes occurred to a bad—meaning an off-channel—start.

ANOTHER large barge followed. It was singular that the big boats came in groups. A lookout man was lashed to a kind of chair or seat ten feet high on the mast. He seemed to be issuing orders, unaware that none could hear or heed him. He was intensely excited. Was it, I wondered, because he knew he was not being obeyed, or merely that he was in the Miles Cañon?

That mast was an oddity. All the boats possessed them, for we sailed across the lakes. But they had been unstepped for the shooting of the rapids. These fellows had schemed to outstrip disaster by the "There she blows!" method. They must have made it, for I did not see them afterward in the boneyard below the White Horse.

Ere this, there must have been one or more of the hystericals, as we called them when comparing notes later. These were parties who, either from a true hysteria, which seemed to infect a whole boatload, or from bravado, or because genuinely elated with the excitement and novelty of the experience, flourished caps, or threw them aloft, or at the cliffs, not infrequently; rose from the thwarts and turned around; waved their arms; shrieked without sound; ate sandwiches, or drank from bottles or canteens—cut all manner of absurd capers.

Judging from their expressions, which were as clear as those in a moving picture, a common thought motivating these demonstrations was "Nothing to it!" Another seemed to be, "We're gonna get through, 'spite of —— and high water." Pure recklessness, too, prompted some of the didoes; while not a few men seemed literally intoxicated with the joy of living through that wild adventure; not knowing, not, for the moment, caring, whether it was to end in death or Dawson!

There were no hysterics in the next comers. They weren't "fixed" for monkey-shines. The make of their craft meant a gallant sort of adventure, spelled with a capital A. It was a little raft, two-tiered and low, which spun a little, in spite of the efforts of the crew, plying oars mounted on braced posts fore and aft. But it went sweeping through with not one whit less dignity than the big boats and barges.

A family party now, in a fine whaleboat, white and trim and well manned. Father, sons, sister, mother—a brave little crew, and knowing what they're about. Mother holds down with her firm left hand venturesome little Willie, crouched at her feet in the bow while her right steadies on her lap an immense cage. In it—a flash of green—is a poll-parrot, chattering, if not cussing.

A line of nondescripts—good, average Lake Bennett scows and barges—seem less interesting for a moment, and my glance returns to the pool, two hundred feet or more to our right. Two other boats are in it now and bid fair to stay. In solemn procession, headed by the slender poling-boat which had been flung into it first, the three cast-away craft float up-stream at a four-mile gait around the rotunda, curve off into the current, and, though only at the edge of it, are shot along with it at a high speed. Surely this time they are out of the eddy, on their journey.

Alas! At the down-river end of the rotunda each in turn is spat off into the whirlpool again, there to recommence their lugubrious volution. It was a beautiful pool, green, placid, wholly charming. But besides the centripetal strength with which it was animated, it must have become charged before that Summer ended with the carbonated bitterness of every malediction born of baffled rage. But there *was* a way out. The poling-boat found it.

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Its oarsmen, grown wise and desperate, rowed to the very extremity of the head of the pool, pointed their boat up-stream *and up-hill*, and bent to their oars with a sudden, desperate frenzy. Forward they shot apace —their upslant, I remember so well, bringing the line of their gunwale exactly into my eye—the current biffed their nose, whirling their bow down-stream; but their impetus, puny though it was, had carried them within the suction of the monster, and they climbed his spine and flew along, waving their caps triumphantly at the two boats left behind in the doldrum of the eddy.

A shadow in the tail of my eye warned me to look up-stream. I did look, and saw a splendid sight. The little river-steamer that had been built during the Spring at the head of Lake Bennett, and which every one said would never make it through the rapids, was actually running the cañon, set straight as a die with the race of the waters, and calm as a May morning. She neither gained nor lost on the small fry abow and astern of her.

She bulked like a colossus in the narrow gullet of the gorge, and stood high out of the water, for she carried little cargo for fear of the shallows of the upper river. She was under her own steam, her stern wheel turning leisurely over for steerage way—whatever good that did her; and beautifully she glided by us, like a proud king of the cañon fleet. On her high, flat cabin top, which ran the length of her, men stood waving and cheering. They were so near us they smiled into our eyes, blew pipe-smoke at us, and yelled their triumph in cordial pantomime. She had some kind of whistle or siren that shot no mean blast, I dare say, on a still river. Here, a sharp ear might have caught a faint squeak with every issuance of white vapor from a brass cylinder above her pilot-house. At her stern there was a surprize.

Two smart Alecks, intending to steal a tow, had made fast a line, which was none too long, to the out-frame of the wheel. Theirs was an anxious berth. Every slight fore and aft undulation of the big hull was grossly magnified in the small boat, which was jerked out of the water and flopped back into it with such rapidity that the little craft became a bucking bronco.

But worse! The air-currents of the gorge flung the spray of the churning bow into the face of the forward man, who was frantically trying to cast off his line, drenching him and no doubt almost flaying the skin from his exposed hands and face. His mate in the stern was as frantically trying to bail. I learned afterward that before they emerged from the cañon the bow man managed to cut his tow-line and get free, and the slack of the line fouled the steamer's rudder, and she nearly hung up on a reef in the treacherous river below the cañon.

But she squeaked through, took the White Horse in one great, lunging dive, and giving the pool at its base a tremendous spank, sent sheets and rockets of spray into the air, deluging a dozen parties camped on the bank of the river. And so, the great danger past, the *Willie Irving*, with colors flying, resumed her maiden voyage down to Dawson town—the first steamer that ever shot the Miles Cañon and the White Horse Rapids, and probably the only one.

BOATS followed boats again, ceaselessly, endlessly; their occupants, like unconscious actors in a motion-picture vastly beyond even our present-day power to achieve, registering every posture and movement, every thought and feeling, every sentiment and emotion of which the human body and the human countenance is capable. It was a cinema of drama ever at its height, of climax and crisis ever at their crest, compelling in the mind of the spectator an interest and attention that survived his bodily endurance—the outthrust of his head, the response of his optic nerve.

After what seemed about thirty minutes of this spectacular performance, Bodkins stirred, emerged somehow from the spell of it, and beckoned to the other two of us for a confab. Stiffly we arose and went to him. He showed us his watch. For five solid, oblivious hours we had lain there.

We walked some distance away from the chasm's edge, and conferring by putting our heads very close together and shouting into each other's ears, decided to go on down to the White Horse Rapids. A brisk walk of an hour brought us to this other great impediment which was perhaps the more famous, and certainly the more dreaded of the two. We came out upon the river at the very base of the rapid.

No wonder it was called the White Horse. It flung a tossing white mane down a forty-degree chute where the whole mighty river was funneled to a closer pent of waters

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than in the narrowest throat of the cañon. It was a short plunge—something like fifty or seventy-five feet—but it was preceded by a less steep stretch of maddened water that put your heart into your mouth before you tilted for the dive. A deep and beautiful dark green pool lay at the base of the White Horse, placid and glassy, except for the part immediately beyond the chute. That was a disk of slightly mounded, lightish green, aerated water that seethed like a caldron.

On came the Argonauts, at times only one or two minutes apart. The gigantic, frothing steed caught them in his tossing mane, every rocking, careening, tipsy one of them, and shot them downward with a spatting impact upon the pool from whose surface they bounded off—the lighter even bouncing—to safety. That is, most of them! The short and the sharp-nosed and those flung sidling or listed over did many things, from taking water to foundering, from capsizing to outright smashing. The pool and the quiet, murmurous river running from it reeked of flotsam and jetsam.

Here at the base of the White Horse was the show-place *de luxe*. I climbed up and out on the farthest rock and took the drenching, for the day was warm. Not twenty feet from me the rapid-shooters were flashing down.

I could see them for fifty yards above, approaching on a slant that was terrifying enough—except by comparison with the final plunge. As the oarsmen usually faced the stern, it was only the steersman who saw the drop before the craft tipped to it, and he did various things. If he was a pilot he did nothing—having already seen to it that his boat was well centered and head on.

If he was not a pilot or, at least, a good river-man, he made wild efforts to do something to the boat—usually to throw her to port or starboard. And his zeal frequently exceeded the capacity of the thole-pins confining his oar or sweep, and the thing would break out sidewise from its fulcrum point and he'd stagger and crouch down and curse or pray or just grit his teeth and wait.

It was the abrupt upheaval of the stern, the sudden lurching of their bodies backward that told the oarsmen that the big moment was at hand, the White Horse under them. Hands grasped thwarts, torsos twisted. The urge to see their plunge was irresistible. Most oars were raised. Those that were not were instantly wrenched away and lost in the smother.

Down they went, every face staring into the glinting, boiling green of the caldron below. In the gorge no two men had behaved alike. But here, in the White Horse, individual differences seemed for the moment quenched. In the poignancy of the sudden tilt and plunge all acted alike.

Sauntering down the river, we saw and heard of several casualties and saw evidences of many mishaps. Outfits were spread along for half a mile, drying in the sun. Tarpaulins still white from store shelves, sails that had been bleached in the winds and suns of the upper lakes, now served as drying mats for beans, rice, dried fruits, corn-meal—everything.

The river-front had the appearance of a bazaar or mart. The Nile, above Cairo, might anciently have looked like this—from a distance. Every party's domestic secrets lay bared to the public gaze, the innermost details of the larder and the wardrobe pitilessly exposed. But they were too happy to care a rap for that. For they thought the worst was past. In reality it had yet to come. The Thirty-Mile River lay ahead, after Lake Le Barge.

The thunderous spectacle of the cañon and rapids, which looked more dangerous than they were, had been well adventured but, oddly enough, that thirty miles of swift current, weaving treacherously among hidden rocks and reefs, was a joker, and a grim one, that few of us knew anything about. That, however, is another story.

WE RETURNED to the head of the cañon early in the afternoon, sure that we had an excellent chance of shooting our clumsy scow through without mishap. We made it, kiting, with but one incident that almost—However, this is it:

While Howard betook himself off to look up a pilot, Bodkins and I went silently about the work of preparing the big blunderbus for the run next morning. Silently, I say. Meaning that for weeks Bodkins and I had spoken to each other only when absolutely necessary. I was the youngster of the party, and he, a big, burly devil, had persecuted me—or so I felt. It was a usual thing amongst the Klondikers, whose ill-assorted parties were made up in

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frantic haste to reach the gold-fields. Split-up Island, lower down the river, became the monument of their dissolution. But that, too, is another story, and a tragi-comedy in itself.

I noticed that the big stern-sweep tholepins were loose, and got out tools to fix them. I had forgotten who was originally responsible for those very important little posts. Perhaps it was Bodkins. Anyhow, he surlily demanded the tools, meaning that here was too serious a piece of repairing to trust to a youth. He knew I could make a better job of it than he could, but, you see, I had gone about it without first obtaining a royal charter from him for the right to engage in the task. He was captain. That settled it.

After he finished the job I inspected it—when he was elsewhere. I hoped it would hold. In fact, I thought surely it would when, next morning, the pilot appeared shouldering a light, straight-grained hickory oar which was a mere toy compared with our twenty-five foot stern-sweep.

We made a clean bolt of the cañon, or rather the cañon, in seeming, made a clean bolt of us backward, while our scow motionlessly sat the motionless ridge of the engorged river.

Mr. Pilot, a slender but very active and sinewy Canadian, had leaned on his oar and smoked his way through the cañon, but in the bit of nasty river below it he called for steerage-way and dipped and jerked his little oar most effectively, and we had no fears. We glided close to the rocks occasionally—perilously, it might have seemed. But we were in the main current—our pilot saw to that—and the main current made a specialty of flowing between rocks, not against them. Presently the river narrowed again and entered a lesser cañon at the end of which was the great, foamy, roaring chute of the White Horse.

The four of us, rowing evenly, facing the stern, anxiously watching our pilot, saw him take a firmer grip of his oar. His eye narrowed. He took a dip to the left, gave a quick heave to the right. His job now was simply to keep the scow head on. That was all, but it took skill and quickness. Suddenly we lifted. An instant later the bow dropped, the stern reared. We looked *up-hill* at the pilot, cool, his brow drawn, his lips compressed.

He essayed to throw the stern a point to starboard. He dipped his oar, put his weight against it in one sturdy lunge and—the pin broke! Still holding the oar, he pitched to starboard, teetered on the scow's edge one life-or-death moment and just managed to keep from toppling overboard!

That gallant, dauntless chap almost sacrificed to the petty spite of a hulking bully! Rage possessed me, magnified by excitement. It was the psychological moment for revenge. It was crow now or, perhaps, never. I was just a crazy kid. I jerked in my oar, rose, shook my fist at Bodkins. The roar of the dashing waters was in our ears, but my larynx was the stoutest thing about me.

"You're a —— of a carpenter, you are!" I yelled at him. Of its sort, it was the greatest triumph I have ever known.

We were pitching headlong. To keep my balance, I had to lean far forward, as I yelled my derision at Bodkins. The next moment our flat bow struck the seemingly solid surface of the pool with the roar-muffled report of a cannon and dashed up into the air a three-sided sheet of jagged water that walled us about, obscuring everything. It clattered down on the canvas that covered our cargo and drenched us as the scow flattened to the surface of the pool and rode smoothly across it to safety.

We pulled into the bank to land our pilot and pay him—one sack of corn-meal, worth twenty dollars. Howard had to do it. The pilot had understood the denunciation I hurled at Bodkins and declined to do business with that gentleman.

That afternoon, in the middle of a treacherous river, I made at—not to—Bodkins, a certain sarcastic remark. He had scarcely spoken to any one all day, gnawing his heart out, of course. He came close to me, hands working.

I appraised him. He was a giant, close to twice my weight and strength; and he burned with shame and a murderous rage. I knew, as I knew I lived, that I would not live long if I didn't watch my step.

"I'll heave you overboard," he gritted, "if you don't shut up!"

I shut up.

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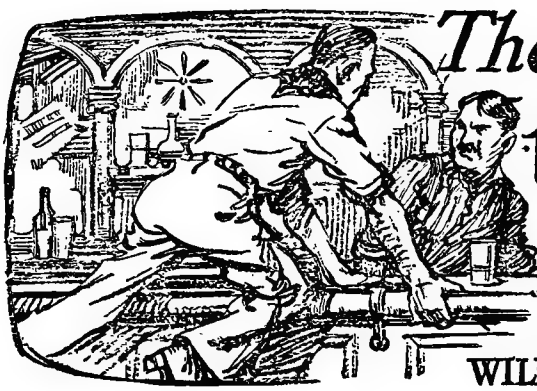

The Heart of the Range

A Five-Part Story
Part IV

by

WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE

Author of "Lynch Lawyers," "Oh Lordy, Lordy!" etc.

The first part of the story briefly told in story form

RACEY DAWSON, after a drunken spree in the Happy Heart Saloon, awoke with an aching head on a side-hill. He made a startling discovery that the horse upon which he had departed from the Happy Heart was not his horse, and straightway he rode to the blacksmith-shop to solve the mystery.

There Racey was still kept in the dark, for the smith and even "Kansas" Casey, the deputy sheriff, took the "horse-rustling" as a joke. But none would tell Racey who had his horse or whose horse he now rode.

Certain feminine articles in the saddle-pocket led Racey to inquire of Miss Blythe, keeper of the Blue Pigeon Store, and she identified the horse as that of Miss Dale, an old maid who lived with her parents, new residents of the cow-country, on the Dale ranch.

Before he went there to swap horses, Racey, in a Chinese restaurant, quarreled with a burly youth over a yellow dog that the youth apparently was trying to steal from the girl lookout of the Happy Heart. They went outdoors and gun-play ensued, and Racey, quicker on the draw, shot the youth in the shoulder. Then Racey went into the Happy Heart.

When he came out, two men were examining the spot where the shooting had taken place—Lanpher, owner of the 88 ranch, and a good-looking stranger. From their conversation Racey knew that a plot was afoot to dispossess a certain old "Chin-whisker." He also learned that several other cowmen were in the plot, including Luke Tweezy, a notorious lawyer.

While Racey was riding away, the girl of the Happy Heart, whose dog he had protected, rode up and informed him that the burly youth whom he had "plugged" was "Nebraska" Jones, leader of the Currycomb crowd of gunfighters. Nebraska would surely requite that shot, she said.

When he rode to the Dale ranch to return the pony, he found that the "old maid," Dale's daughter, was a pretty young girl. But before he exchanged the pony for his own mount, he warned her of the plot afoot to dispossess her father. While he was talking with her, Dale came in drunk. Racey, inspired by the pretty Miss Dale, was determined to play a high hand in the game between Dale and the plotters.

Jack Harpe was one of the plotters. He had already engaged Racey and his pal, "Swing" Tunstall, to ride on the ranch. But suddenly he informed Racey and Swing that he had changed his mind and given the job to two old friends.

At the Starlight Saloon, Racey and Swing, with Luke Tweezy, drank together, with the result that Racey and Swing lay in a pile of hay in Tom Kane's stable to sober up. Looking across at the back porch of the Blue Pigeon Store, they saw Luke Tweezy talking to Miss Blythe and Molly Dale.

Later somebody came into the stable. He stumbled over Racey and drew a knife. Racey knocked him unconscious with his revolver-barrel and the newcomer proved to be Luke Tweezy. Racey found a letter to Luke from Jacob Pooley in Luke's hat, which unmistakably revealed the plot against Dale.

Marie, the lookout of the Happy Heart, later led Racey away from Main Street of Farewell, where "Bull," the bartender of the Starlight Saloon, to requite an old score, was lying in wait to "bush-whack" him.

Racey hid outside Marie's cabin while she talked with Bull and revealed that Jack Harpe's real name was Bill Smith, whom Bull and she knew in past years. When Bull left, Racey took him prisoner and asked him why Bill Smith changed his name. Bull refused to tell, but when Racey threatened to run him out of town if he refused, the bartender promised to tell the story of Bill Smith—alias Harpe—before sundown the following night.

Racey and Swing occupied a room next to that of Jack Harpe and Lanpher in the hotel. Alone in the room, Racey unpacked a war-bag and found a blood-stained knife rolled in an undershirt. Racey suspected treachery and dropped the knife through a knot-hole between the partitions.

That morning the body of Bull, his throat cut, was found near the hotel. Sheriff Jake Rule suspected Racey of the murder and with Kansas Casey searched the cowboy's room. While they were conducting the investigation, Jack Harpe's actions led Racey to suspect him of all the treachery. Racey was exonerated.

Marie was arrested in Farewell later for attempting to murder Jack Harpe. After her arrest the jail burned to the ground, but Kansas rescued Marie and Justice Dolan discharged her, maintaining that she had acted in self-defense against Harpe.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE SHOW-DOWN

RACEY, walking suddenly round the corner of the Dale stable, came upon Mr. Dale tilting a bottle toward the sky. The business-end of the bottle was inserted between Mr. Dale's lips. His Adam's apple slid gravely up and down. He did not see Racey Dawson.

"Howdy," said the puncher.

Mr. Dale removed the bottle, whirled and thrust the bottle behind him.

"Oh, it's you," he said, blinking and slowly producing the bottle. "Huh-have one on me."

"Not today," refused Racey, shaking his head. "I got a misery in my stummick. Doctor won't lemme drink nothin'."

"Yeah?" Thus Mr. Dale with interest. Then, again proffering the liquor, he said: "This here's fine for the misery. Better have a snooter."

"No, I guess not."

"Well, I will," averred Mr. Dale and downed three swallows rapidly. "Yeah," he continued, driving in the cork with the heel of his hand, "a feller needs a drink now an' then."

"Helps him stand off trouble, don't it?" Racey hazarded sympathetically, perceiving an opening.

"Shore does," answered Mr. Dale. "I should say so. Dunno who'd oughta know that better'n I do. Trouble, Racey—Well, say, I'm just made of trouble, I am."

"Aw, it ain't so bad as that," encouraged Racey.

"Yes it is too," contradicted the other. "I got more trouble on my hands than a rat-tailed hoss tied short in fly-time. Trouble—nothin' but."

"Nothin' is so bad as it looks."

"Heaps of times she's worse."

"I'm yore friend. You know me. If I can help you——"

"Nobody can help me. I dunno what to do, Racey."

"Well, you know best, I expect, but I've always found if I talk over with somebody else anythin' that bothers me it don't seem to stick up half so big."

Mr. Dale sank down upon one run-over heel and stared blearily off across the flats. The bottle in his hip-pocket made a pronounced bulge under the cloth.

"I dunno what to do, Racey," he said, looking up sidewise at Racey where he stood in front of him, his hands in his pockets and his hat on the back of his head. "I owe a lot o' money. I dunno how I'm gonna pay it, an' I'm worried."

"Let the other feller do the worryin'," suggested Racey.

"I wish I could," said Mr. Dale drearily. "I wish I could."

"Why don't you then?"

"He'll foreclose—they'll foreclose, I mean."

"Aw, maybe not."

"Yeah, they will. I know 'em, ——' em. They'd have the shirt off my back if they could. Yuh see, Racey, she's thisaway: I borrowed five thousand dollars from the Marysville bank, on a mortgage, an' there they went an' sold the mortgage to Lanpher of the 88 an' Luke Tweezy. An' there's the rub, Racey. The bank would 'a' renewed all right, but you can put down a bet an' go the limit that Lanpher an' Tweezy won't. I done asked 'em."

"Five thousand dollars is a lot of money," said Racey soberly. He had been thinking that the mortgage would not have been above two thousand at the outside. But five thousand! What in Sam Hill had old Dale done with the money? In the next breath Dale answered the unspoken question:

"I needed the money," he said in a low voice, his eyes lowered, "an'—an' I had bad luck with it."

"Yeah, I know—them cattle dyin' an' all."

"Cattle! What cattle?" Mr. Dale stared blankly at Racey. "Oh, them! ——, they didn't have nothin' to do with it, them cattle didn't. I'd worked out a system, Racey, a system to beat roulette an' I was shore it was all right. By —— it was all right! They was nothin' wrong with that system. But I had bad luck. I had most awful bad luck."

"An' the system, I take it, didn't work?"

"It didn't—against my bad luck."

Mr. Dale again dropped his eyes, and Racey stared down at the hump-shouldered old figure with something akin to pity in his gaze. Certainly he was sorry for him. He was not in the least scornful despite the fact that it did not seem possible that any sensible man could be such a fool. A system—a system to beat roulette! And bad luck! The drably ancient and moth-

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eaten story with which every unsuccessful gambler seeks to establish an alibi.

"Whose wheel was it?" said Racey.

"Lacey's at Marysville."

"In the back room of the Sweet Dreams, huh? An' there's nothin' crooked about Lacey's wheel, neither. It's as square as Lacey himself."

"Lacey's wasn't the only wheel. They was McFluke's too."

So McFluke had a wheel, had he? This was news to Racey Dawson.

"How long has McFluke been runnin' a wheel?" inquired Racey.

"Quite a while," was the vague reply.

"A year?"

"Maybe longer. I dunno."

"Funny it never got round."

"It was a private wheel. Only for his friends. Nothin' public about it."

"Who used to play it besides you?" persisted Racey, hanging to his subject like a bull-pup to a tramp's trousers.

Mr. Dale wrinkled his forehead. "Besides me? Le'ssee now. They was Doc Coffin, Nebraska Jones, Honey Hoke an' Punch-the-breeze Thompson."

"Nobody else?"

"Aw, Calloway an' Norton an' that bunch," Mr. Dale said shamefacedly.

Racey nodded his head slowly. A crooked wheel. Of course it was crooked. Why not? That Dale, Calloway, Norton and a few other gentlemen of the neighborhood were under their wives' thumbs to such a degree that they did not dare to gamble openly was a matter of common knowledge.

What more natural than that some one should provide them with a private gambling-place? With such cappers as Nebraska and his gang, losers would not feel equal to making much of an outcry. It must be a paying occupation for McFluke or Nebraska, whoever was at the bottom of the business.

RACEY nodded again and squatted down on his heels. He picked up a stick and squinted along its length.

"None of my business, of course," he said casually, "but would you mind tellin' me how much you lost to McFluke?"

"About seven thousand."

Racey looked up at the sky. Seven thousand dollars! The full amount of the mortgage and two thousand more. And McFluke had it all.

"Yuh see," said Mr. Dale dolefully, "I began to make money after I'd been here a while an' my health come back. Yeah, I made money all right, all right."

He pushed back his hat and scratched a grizzled head.

"I had luck," he added. "But you wasn't round here then. You'd gone to the Bend."

"Yep, I'd gone to the Bend, —— it all, an' it shore seems like I'd stayed there too long. Didn't you ever guess McFluke's wheel wasn't straight?"

"Aw, it was so straight. Mac wouldn't cheat nobody. Yo're—yo're mistaken, Racey."

"I am, huh? Like —— I'm mistaken. I know what I'm talkin' about. I tell yuh flat, McFluke is so crooked he could swallow a nail an' spit out a corkscrew. An' he's got that wheel trained. You just bet he has. Look under the table an' see what he's doin' with his feet or his knees. My —— Dale, didn't you know they make roulette-wheels with a brake like a wagon?"

"I—I've heard of 'em," Mr. Dale nodded hesitatingly. "But I'm shore Mac's is on the level."

"An' you bet seven thousand dollars it was on the level, didn't yuh?"

"But——"

"But where did yuh come out? Do you think you ever got a show for yore money?"

"Oh, I won a bet now an' then," defended Mr. Dale.

"Small ones, shore. Naturally he's gotta let yuh win now an' then to sort of toll yuh along an' keep yuh good-natured. You won now an' then; yep. But did you ever win when you had a sizable stake up?"

Mr. Dale shook his head.

"No, come to think of it, I don't believe I ever did."

"I knowed you didn't," exclaimed Racey triumphantly. "I tell yuh that wheel is crooked."

"Not so loud," cautioned Mr. Dale. "They'll hear you in the house."

"Don't they know nothin' about it a-tall?" probed Racey.

"They know about the five-thousand-dollar mortgage," admitted Dale reluctantly.

Racey rubbed his chin.

"I was here when Molly found it out."

Mr. Dale nodded miserably. He was too utterly wretched to resent Racey's interference with his affairs.

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"She—she told me," he said.

"Don't they know about the other two thousand you lost to McFluke, or what you dropped at Lacey's?"

Mr. Dale shook his head.

"I never told 'em. I—I only lost fifteen or sixteen hundred at Lacey's anyway."

"Fifteen or sixteen hundred is a whole lot when you ain't got it," said the direct and brutal Racey. "Instead of seven thousand then, you done lost eighty-five or eighty-six hundred. I swear I don't see how you managed to lose all that an' yore family not find it out."

"I kept quiet."

"I guess you did keep quiet. —— yes! Lookit, Dale, I'm gonna help you out of this. But you gotta start fresh. You gotta go in an' make a clean breast to the family about where the other thirty-six hundred over an' above the five thousand went."

Mr. Dale's jaw dropped.

"I—I never even told 'em where the five thousand went."

"Huh? I thought you said they knowed about the mortgage after Molly found it out."

"They knowed about the mortgage all right enough, but they dunno where the money went. Yuh see, Racey, I—I done told 'em I lost it in a land deal."

"You did! Aw right, you go right in an' tell 'em the truth, all of it, every last smidgen."

"I cuc-can't!" protested Mr. Dale. "I ain't got the heart!"

"You ain't got the nerve, you mean. You go on an' tell 'em, Dale, an' I'll fix it up for yuh, but I ain't gonna fix up nothin' for yuh if you ain't gonna play square with them women from now on. An' you can't play square with 'em without you begin by tellin' 'em the truth."

"How you gonna help me out?" temporized Mr. Dale.

"I'm goin' to Old Salt, that's what I'm gonna do. I'll fix it up with him to lend you the money."

Mr. Dale shook his head.

"He won't do it."

"Shore he'll do it. You don't think he's gonna have somebody else come in here in yore place, do you? Not much he ain't. He'll lend you the money an' glad to."

"I done already asked him, an' he wouldn't."

"You asked him, an' he wouldn't," repeated Racey stupidly. "When did you ask him?"

"About two months ago—soon as ever I found out I wouldn't be able to pay off the mortgage."

"An' he wouldn't lend it to yuh. I don't understand it. It ain't reasonable. Lookit here, did you tell him what you wanted it for? Did you tell him about the mortgage?'

"Nun-no," said Mr. Dale in a still, small voice. "I didn't."

"Why didn't you?"

"'Cause I was afraid he'd take advantage of me. I was afraid he'd fix it so as to take my ranch away from me if he knowed how bad an' what for I needed it."

"But ain't that exactly what the Marysville bank could 'a' done if it wanted?" demanded Racey, aghast at the Dale obtuseness.

"Yeah, but I had hopes of standin' off the bank, an'——"

"But you ain't got no hope of standin' off Lanpher an' Tweezy. Nary a hope. Now lookit; Old Salt is yore only chance round here. Of course, he'd fix it to take away yore ranch if he could. That's his business. An' it's yore business to see he don't. An' it's my business to help you see he don't. S'pose now I go to Old Salt an' get him to lend yuh the money on a mortgage, say a ten-year mortgage?"

"But I got one mortgage on the place now. He'd never take a second mortgage."

"Naw, naw, that ain't gonna be the way of it a-tall. It will be fixed so's Old Salt's mortgage won't go into effect till the first one's paid off."

"But then till the first one is paid off—maybe it will be three-four days—Old Salt's five thousand will be unsecured."

"It won't be unsecured. It won't go out of Saltoun's hands. He'll pay off the mortgage himself."

"Do yuh think yuh can get a easy rate from Old Salt?" asked Dale, the light of a new hope dawning in his faded old eyes. "It's a awful tax on a feller payin' the full legal rate."

"We'll have to take what we can get, but I'll do my best to tone it down. Sometimes a man will take less if he has another object in view besides the interest. An' you bet Old Salt will have a plenty big object in view in keepin' out Lanpher an' Tweezy. Money ain't tight now anyway. I'll do

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the best I can for yuh. Don't you fret. You go on in now an' square up with the women an' I'll slide out to the Bar S instanter."

Mr. Dale, the poor old man, laid a hand on Racey's strong young forearm.

"I'll tell 'em," he said. "I'll tell 'em. You—you fix it up with Old Salt."

Abruptly he turned away and hobbled hurriedly around the corner of the barn.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SHOOTING

RACEY DAWSON, riding back to Moccasin Spring, was in a warm and pleasant frame of mind. With him rode Old Salt, and with Old Salt rode Old Salt's checkbook. Racey had, after much argument and persuasion, made excellent arrangements with Mr. Saltoun. The latter, anxious though he was to own the Dale place himself, had agreed to pay off the mortgage bought by Lanpher and Tweezy and take in return a six per cent. mortgage for ten years. No wonder Racey was pleased with himself. He had a right to be.

As they crossed the Marysville and Farewell trail Racey's horse picked up a fortuitous stone. Racey dismounted. Mr. Saltoun, slouching comfortably back against his cantle, looked doubtfully down at Racey where he stood humped over, the horse's hoof between his knees, tapping with a knife-handle at the lodged stone.

"A ten-year mortgage is a long one, kind of," he said slowly.

"I thought we'd settled all that." Racey lifted a quick head.

"Shore we've done settled it," Mr. Saltoun acquiesced promptly. "That's all right. I'm goin' through with my part of it. Gotta do it. Nothin' else to do. I was just a-thinkin', that's all."

Racey merely grunted. He resumed his tapping.

"Alla same," Mr. Saltoun said suddenly, "I don't believe this Jack Harpe feller had anythin' to do with this mortgage deal, Racey."

"Don't yuh?"

"No, I don't. You can't make me believe they's any coon in that tree. If they was, why ain't Jack Harpe done nothin' before this? Tell me that. Why ain't he?"

"—— if I know."

"Shore you don't. You was mistaken, Racey. Badly mistaken. Yore judgment was out by a mile. She's all just Luke Tweezy an' that lousy skunk of a Lanpher tryin' to act spotty. No more than that."

"Well, ain't that enough?"

"Shore, but——"

"But nothin'. Where'd you be if I hadn't found out about it, huh? Wouldn't you look nice feedin' other folks' cows on yore grass?"

"Alla same, they wouldn't 'a' been Jack Harpe's cows."

"Which is all you know about it. You never would take warnin' an' you know it. How about the time when Blakely was the 88 manager, an' they was rustlin' yore cattle so fast it made a quarter-hoss racin' full split look slow?"

"Well, but—" interrupted Mr. Saltoun, beginning to fidget with his reins.

"An' the time Cutnose Canter tried to run off a whole herd of hosses on you?" Racey breezed on, warming to his subject. "You wouldn't let Chuck warn you. Oh, no, not you. He didn't know what he was talkin' about. No, he didn't. An' how did it turn out, huh? What did that li'l party cost you? Yeah, I would begin frizzlin' round if I was you. You'll generally notice the feller who's the last to laugh enjoys it the most. I'm that feller—me an' Swing both."

"Aw, say——"

"Yeah, me an' Swing will be thankin' you for a healthy big check apiece when our time-limit is up. Yes indeedy, that's us."

"Is *that* so? *Is* that so? You got another guess, Racey, an' it's me that will get the most out o' that laugh. If it's like I say, even if Lanpher an' Tweezy are tryin' a game, you don't get paid a nickel if Jack Harpe ain't in on the deal. You done put in the Jack Harpe end of it yoreself. I heard you. So did Tom Loudon, an' Swing too. Jack Harpe. Yeah. He is the tune you was playin' alla time. An' up to now I can't see that Jack Harpe has made a move, not a move."

"But——"

"Lanpher an' Tweezy wasn't in the bet," insisted Mr. Saltoun. "It was Jack Harpe an' you know it. 'If Jack Harpe don't start tryin' to get Dale's ranch away from him an' run cattle in on you inside of six months you don't have to pay us.' Them was yore very words, Racey. I got 'em

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wrote down all so careful. I know 'em by heart."

"I'll bet you do," Racey told him heartily. "I'll gamble you been studyin' them words in all yore spare time."

"It pays to be careful," smiled Mr. Saltoun. "Always bear that in mind. I ain't wantin' to rub nothin' in, Racey, but if you'd 'a' been a mite more careful, just a mite more careful, you wouldn't be out so much at the finish. Drinks are on you, cowboy. An' when you stop to think that I'd 'a' made the bet just the same if you'd wanted Lanpher an' Tweezy in on it. Only you didn't."

"Guess I must 'a' overlooked 'em, huh?" grinned Racey. "Feller can't think of everythin', can he?"

"I'm glad to see yo're takin' it thisaway," approved Mr. Saltoun. "Workin' for six months for nothin' don't seem to bother you a-tall."

"I ain't worked six months for nothin'—yet," pointed out Racey. "The six months ain't up—yet. You wanna remember, Salt, that a race ain't over till the horses cross the line."

"You gotta prove Jack Harpe's connection—" began Mr. Saltoun.

Racey topped his mount, but, as the horse started, he held him up.

"Lessee who's comin'," he suggested, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

He and Mr. Saltoun both turned their heads. Some one was riding toward them along the trail from the direction of the Lazy River ford. Racey had caught the clatter of the horse's hoofs on the rocks of a wash wherein the trail lay concealed.

"Siftin' right along," said Mr. Saltoun.

Racey nodded. Horse and rider slid into sight above the side of the wash and trotted toward them.

"Looks like Punch-the-breeze Thompson," said Mr. Saltoun.

"It is Thompson," confirmed Racey. "Didn't it strike you he sort of hesitated a li'l bit when he first seen us; like a man might whose breakfast didn't rest easy on his stomach, as you might say?"

Mr. Saltoun nodded.

"He did sway back on them lines at the top."

"An' he ain't boilin' along quite so fast now as he was in the wash," elaborated Racey.

"I noticed that, too," admitted Mr. Saltoun.

They waited, barring the trail. Punch-the-breeze Thompson did not attempt to ride around them. He pulled up and nodded easily to the two men.

"They's been a fracas down at McFluke's," Thompson said.

"Fracas?" Racey cocked an eyebrow.

"Yeah—old Dale an' a stranger."

Racey nodded. He knew with a great certainty what was coming next.

"Anybody hurt?" he asked.

"Old Dale."

"Bad?"

"Killed."

Racey nodded again.

"Even break?"

"We don't think so," Thompson stated frankly.

"Who's we?" queried Racey.

"Oh, Austin, Honey Hoke, Doc Coffin, McFluke, Jack Harpe, Lanpher an' Luke Tweezy. We all just didn't like the way the stranger went at it, so I'm goin' to Farewell after the sheriff."

"Yo're holdin' the stranger then, I take it?" put in Mr. Saltoun.

"Well, no, not exactly," replied Thompson. "He got away, that stranger did."

"An' didn't none of you make any try at stoppin' him a-tall?" demanded Racey.

"Plenty," Thompson replied with a stony face. "I took a shot at him myself just as he was hoppin' through the window. I missed."

"Yet they say yo're a good snap shot, Thompson," threw in Racey.

"I am—most usual," admitted Thompson. "But this time my hand must 'a' shook or somethin'."

"Yep," concurred Racey, "I shore guess it must 'a' shook or—somethin'."

Thompson faced Racey.

"Or somethin'," he repeated hardily. "Meanin'?"

"What I said," replied Racey calmly. "I never mean more'n I say—ever."

THOMPSON continued to regard Racey fixedly. Mr. Saltoun was glad that he himself was two yards to the right and he would not have objected to double the distance.

Racey's hands were folded on the horn of his saddle. Thompson's right hand hung at his side. Racey had told the truth when he spoke of Thompson as a good snap shot. He was all of that. And

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he was fairly quick on the draw as well.

It would seem that, taking into consideration the position of Thompson's right hand, that Thompson had a shade the better of it. Racey thought so. But he hoped, nevertheless, by shooting through the bottom of his holster, to plant at least one bullet in Thompson before the latter killed him.

The decision lay with Thompson. Would he elect to fight? Racey could almost see the thoughts at conflict behind Thompson's frontal bone. Mr. Saltoun, hoping against hope, sat tensely silent. Racey's eyes held Thompson's steadily.

Slowly, inch by inch, Thompson's right hand moved upward—and away from the gun-butt. He gathered his reins in his left hand and with his hitherto menacing right he tilted his hat forward and began to scratch the back of his head.

"If you don't mean more'n yuh say," offered Thompson, "yuh don't mean much."

"Which is all the way you look at it," said Racey.

"An' a —— good way, too," nipped in Mr. Saltoun hurriedly, inwardly cursing Racey for not letting well enough alone. "What was the fight about, Thompson?"

"Cards," said Thompson laconically, switching his eyes briefly to Mr. Saltoun's face.

"An' the stranger cold-decked him?" inquired Racey.

"Somethin' like that, but I can't say for shore. I wasn't playin' with him. Doc Coffin was, an' so was Honey Hoke an' Peaches Austin. Peaches said he kind of had a idea the stranger dealt two cards from the bottom just before old Dale started to crawl his hump. But Peaches ain't shore about it. Seemin'ly old Dale is the only one was shore, an' he's dead."

"An' yo're goin' for the coroner, huh?" asked Racey.

"I said so."

"But you didn't say if anybody was chasin' the stranger now. Are they?"

"Shore," was the prompt reply. "They all took out after him—all except McFluke, that is."

Racey nodded.

"I expect McFluke would wanna stay with Dale," he said gently, "just as you'd wanna go to Farewell after the coroner. Yo're shore it is the coroner, Thompson?"

"Say, how many times do yuh want me to tell yuh?" demanded the badgered Thompson. "Of course it's the coroner. In a case like this the coroner's gotta be notified."

"I expect," assented Racey. "I expect. But if yo're really goin' for the coroner, Thompson, what made yuh tell us when you first met us you was goin' for the sheriff?"

"Why," said Thompson without a quiver, "I'm a-goin' for him too. I must 'a' forgot to say so at first."

"Yeah, I guess you did." Thus Racey, annoyed that Thompson had contrived to crawl through the fence. He had hoped that Thompson might be tempted to a demonstration, for which potentiality he, Racey, had prepared by removing his right hand from the saddle-horn.

"It don't always pay to forget, Thompson," suggested Mr. Saltoun coldly.

"It don't," Thompson assented readily. "An' I don't—most always."

"Don't stay here any longer on our account, Thompson," said Racey. "You've done told us about enough."

"Try an' remember it," Thompson bade him, and lifted his reins.

"We will, an' on the other hand don't you forget yore sheriff an' yore coroner."

"I won't," grinned Thompson and rode past and away.

"He ain't goin' for the sheriff an' the coroner any more'n I am," declared Mr. Saltoun disgustedly, turning in the saddle to gaze after the vanishing horseman.

"Of course he ain't," almost barked Racey. "In this country fellers like Thompson don't ride hell-bent just to tell the sheriff an' the coroner a feller has been killed. Murder ain't no such e-vent as all that. Unless," he added thoughtfully, "Thompson is the stranger."

"You mean Thompson might 'a' killed him?"

"I don't think it would spoil his appetite any. You remember how fast he was peltin' along down in the wash, an' how he slowed up after seein' us? A murderer would act just thataway."

Mr. Saltoun nodded.

"A gent can't do nothin' on guesswork," he said bromidically. "Facts are what count."

"You'll find before we get to the bottom of this business," observed Racey sagely, "that guesswork is gonna lead us to a whole heap of facts."

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"I hope so," Mr. Saltoun said, uncomfortably conscious that the death of Dale might seriously complicate the lifting of the mortgage.

Racey was no less uncomfortable, and for the same reason. He felt sure that the killing of Dale had been inspired in order to settle once for all the future of the Dale ranch. No wonder Luke Tweezy had been so positive in his assertion that Old Man Saltoun would not lend any money to Dale. The latter had been marked for death at the time. Despite the fact that Tweezy and Harpe were at last being seen together in public, thus indicating that the "deal," to quote Pooley's letter to Tweezy, had been "sprung," Racey doubted that the murder formed part of Jacob Pooley's "absolutely safe" plan for forcing out Dale. While in some ways the murder might be considered sufficiently safe the method of it and the act itself did not smack of Pooley's handiwork. It was much more probable that the killing was the climax of Luke Tweezy's original plan adhered to by the attorney and his friends against the advice and wishes of Jacob Pooley.

"Guess we better go on to McFluke's," was Racey's suggestion.

They went.

"Looks like they got back mighty soon from chasin' the stranger," said Racey when they came in sight of the place, eying the number of horses tied to the hitching-rail.

"Maybe they got him quick," Mr. Saltoun offered sardonically.

THEY rode on and added their horses to the tail-switching string in front of the saloon. Racey did not fail to note that none of the other horses gave any evidence of having been ridden either hard or lately. Which, in the face of Thompson's assertion that the men he left behind had ridden in pursuit of the murderer, seemed rather odd. Or perhaps it was not so odd, looking upon it from another angle.

The saloon, when they had ridden up, had been quiet as the well-known grave. It remained equally silent when they entered.

McFluke, behind the bar, wearing a black eye and a puffed nose, nodded to them civilly. In chairs ranged round the walls sat an assortment of men: Peaches Austin, Luke Tweezy, Jack Harpe, Doc Coffin, Honey Hoke and Lanpher. The latter was nursing a slung right arm. They were all there, the men mentioned by name by Thompson as having been in the place when Dale was killed.

"What is this, a graveyard meetin'?" asked Racey of McFluke, glancing from the assembled multitude to McFluke and smiling slightly. It was no part of wisdom, thought Racey, to let these men know of his encounter with Thompson. He had Thompson's story. He was anxious to hear theirs.

" 'A graveyard meetin',' " repeated the saloon-keeper. "Well, an' that's what it is in a manner of speakin'."

Racey stared.

"I bite. What's the answer?"

The saloon-keeper cleared his throat. "Old Dale's been killed."

"Has, huh? Who killed him?" Racey allowed his eyes casually to skim the expressionless faces of the men backed against the walls.

"A stranger killed him," replied McFluke heavily.

Racey removed his eys from the slack-chinned countenance of the saloon-keeper to thin-faced, foxy-nosed Luke Tweezy. Luke's little eyes met his.

"You saw this stranger, Luke?" he asked.

Luke Tweezy nodded.

"We all saw him."

"He was playin' draw with Honey Hoke an' Peaches Austin an' me," Doc Coffin offered oilily.

"An' the stranger?" amended Racey.

"An' the stranger," Doc Coffin accepted the amendment.

"What was the trouble?" pursued Racey.

"Well, we kind of thought—" Doc Coffin's eyes slid round to cross an instant the shifty gaze of Peaches Austin—"we thought maybe this stranger dealt two cards at a clatter. We ain't none shore."

"Dale said he did, anyhow," said Peaches Austin.

"He said so twice," put in Lanpher.

Racey turned deliberately.

"You here," said he softly. "I didn't see you at first. I must be gettin' near-sighted. You saw the whole thing, did yuh, Lanpher?"

"Yeah," replied Lanpher.

"Who pulled first?"

"The stranger." The answer came patly from at least five different men.

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Racey looked grimly upon those present.

"'Most everybody seems shore the stranger's to blame," he observed. "Besides sayin' the stranger was dealin' crooked, did Dale use any other fightin' words?"

"He called him a —— tin-horn," burst simultaneously from the lips of Peaches Austin and McFluke.

"Only two this time," said Racey, shooting a swift glance at Jack Harpe and overjoyed to find the latter dividing a glare of disgust between McFluke and Austin. "But yuh gotta do better than that."

Mr. Saltoun shivered inwardly. He was a man of courage, but not of foolhardy courage, the species of courage that dares death unnecessarily. He was getting on in years, and hoped, when it came his time to die, to pass out peacefully in his nightshirt. And here was that fool of a Racey practically telling Harpe and the other rascals that he was on to their game!

No wonder Mr. Saltoun shivered. He expected matters to come to push of pike in a split second. So, being what he was, a fairly brave man in a tight corner, he put on a hard, confident expression and hooked his thumbs in his belt.

Racey Dawson spread his legs wide and laughed a reckless laugh. He felt reckless. He likewise felt for these men ranged before him the most venomous hate of which he was capable. These men had killed the father of Molly Dale. It did not matter whether any one or all of them had or had not committed the actual murder, they were wholly responsible for it. They had brought it about. He knew it. He knew it just as sure as he was a foot high.

And as he looked upon them sitting there in flinty silence he purposed to make them pay, and pay to the uttermost. That the old man had been a gambler and a drunkard, and the world was undoubtedly a better world for his leaving it, were facts of no moment in Racey's mind. He, Racey, was not one to condone either murder or injustice. And this murder and the injustice of it would cruelly hurt three women.

He laughed again, without mirth. His blue eyes, glittering through the slits of the drawn-down eyelids, were pin-points of wrath. His hard-bitten stare challenged his enemies. —— them! Let them shoot if they wanted to. He was ready. He, Racey Dawson, would show them a fight that would stack up as well as any of which a hard-fighting territory could boast. So, feeling as he did, Racey stared upon his enemies with a frosty, slitted stare and mentally dared them to come to the scratch.

But in moments like these there is always one either to say, "Let's go," or give its equivalent, a sign. And that one is invariably the leader of one side or the other. Racey Dawson saw Luke Tweezy turn a slow head and look toward Jack Harpe. He saw Doc Coffin, Honey and Austin, one after the other, do the same. But Jack Harpe sat immobile. He neither spoke nor gave a sign. Perhaps he did not consider the present a sufficiently propitious moment. No one knew what he thought. Had he known what the future held in store he might have gone after his gun.

Tense, nerves wire-drawn, Racey and Mr. Saltoun awaited the decision.

It came, and like many decisions, its form was totally unexpected. Jack Harpe looked at Racey and said smilelessly—

"Wanna view the remains?"

CHAPTER XX

DRAWING THE COVER

"YOU don't understand it, do yuh, Peaches?" Racey inquired genially of Peaches Austin when he found himself a neighbor of that slippery gentleman at the inquest.

Peaches shied away from Racey on general principles. He feared a catch. There were so many things about Racey that he did not understand.

"Whatcha talkin' about?" Peaches grunted surlily.

"You—me—Chuck—everybody, more or less. You don't, do yuh?"

"Don't what?" A trifle more surlily.

"You don't see how an' why Chuck Morgan is so all-fired friendly with me, an' how I'm a-ridin' for a good outfit like the Bar S, when the last you seen of me, Chuck was a-hazin' me up the trail with my hands over my head. You don't understand it none. I can see it in yore light green eye, Peaches."

Peaches modestly veiled his pale green eyes beneath dropped lids and turned his head away. He would have given a great deal to go elsewhere. But to do that would be to make himself conspicuous and there were many reasons, all more or less cogent,

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why he did not wish to make himself conspicuous. Peaches sat still in his chair and broke into a gentle perspiration.

Racey perceived the other's discomfort and ached to increase it.

"Did you stay here three-four days like I told you to that time a few weeks ago? An' was Jack Harpe most —— awful hot under the collar when you did see him final? An' if so, what happened?"

Racey gaped at Peaches like an expectant terrier watching a rat-hole. It may be that Peaches felt like a holed rat in a hole too small for comfort. He turned on Racey with a flash of defiance.

"There was a feller once," said Peaches, "who bit off more'n he could chew."

"I've heard of him" Racey admitted gravely. "He was first cousin to the other feller that grabbed the bear by the tail."

"I dunno whose first cousin he was," frowned Peaches. "All I know is he didn't show good sense."

"Now that," said Racey, "is where you an' I don't think alike. I may be wrong in what I think. I may have made a mistake, but I gotta be showed why an' wherefore. Anybody is welcome to show me, Peaches, just anybody."

Racey accompanied his remarks with a chilling look. The perspiration of Peaches turned clammy.

"Meanin'?" Peaches queried.

"Meanin'? Why, meanin' that you can show me if you like, Peaches."

This was too much for Peaches. He was out of his depth and unable to swim. He sank with a gurgle of—

"I dunno what yo're drivin' at."

Racey shook a sorrowful head.

"I'm shore sorry to hear it. I was guessin' you did. I had hopes of you, Peaches. You've done gimme a disappointment. Yep, she's a cruel world when all's said an' done."

This was too much for Peaches. He resolved to shift his seat whether it made him conspicuous or not. The gambler removed to a vacant window-sill, upon which he sat and looked anywhere but at Racey Dawson. That young man leaned back in his chair and surveyed the multitude.

Besides the citizens found in the saloon on his and Mr. Saltoun's arrival there were now present Dolan, who combined with his office of justice of the peace that of coroner, and twelve good men and true, the coroner's jury and most intimate friends, ready and willing at any and all times to serve the territory for ten dollars a day and expenses.

In addition to this representative group Alicran Skeel had dropped in from nowhere, Chuck Morgan had driven over with a wagon from Soogan Creek—mercifully the family at Moccasin Spring had not yet been informed of their bereavement—and Sheriff Jake Rule and his deputy, Kansas Casey, had ridden out from Farewell. Punch-the breeze Thompson had returned with the sheriff. Which circumstance either disposed of the theory that Thompson was the murderer, or else Thompson had more nerve than he was supposed to have. Racey began to nurse a distinct grievance against Thompson.

The main room of the saloon, into which the body had been brought from the back room, was a fog of smoke and a blabber of voices. McFluke had not been idle at the bar, and the coroner's jury was three parts drunk. The members had not yet agreed on a verdict. But the delay was a mere matter of form. They always liked to stretch the time and give the territory a good run for her money.

Racey Dawson, conscious that both Jack Harpe and Luke Tweezy were watching him covertly, rolled a meticulous cigaret. He scratched a match on the chair-seat, held it to the end of the cigaret and stared across the pulsing flame straight into the eyes of the Marysville lawyer. Tweezy's gaze wavered and fell away. Racey inhaled strongly, then got to his feet and lazed across to the bar where Jake Rule, with Kansas Casey at his elbow, was perfunctorily questioning McFluke. The latter's hard, close-coupled, blue eyes narrowed at Racey's approach.

Racey, as he draped himself against the bar, was careful to nudge Casey's foot with a surreptitious toe.

"Jake," said Racey, "would I be interruptin' the proceedin's too much if I made a motion for us to drink all round?"

"Not a-tall," declared the sheriff heartily.

Racey turned to McFluke.

When their hands had encircled the glasses for the third time, Racey, instead of drinking, suddenly looked across the bar at McFluke, who was industriously swabbing the bar-top.

"Mac," he said easily, "when that

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stranger run out the door how many gents fired at him?"

"Punch Thompson," replied McFluke, the slushing cloth stopping abruptly. "You heard him tell the coroner how he fired and missed, didn't yuh?"

"Oh, I heard, I heard," Racey answered. "No harm in askin' again, is there? Can't be too shore about these here—killin's, can yuh? Mac, which door did the stranger run through—the one into the back room or the one leadin' outdoors?"

"Why, the one leadin' outdoors, o' course." McFluke's surprize at the question was evident.

"Jake," said Racey, "s'pose now you ask Punch Thompson what the stranger was doin' when he cut down on him."

The sheriff regarded Racey with his keen gray gaze. Then he faced about and singled out Thompson from a knot of men across the room.

"Punch," he called, and then put Racey's question in his own words.

"What was he doin'?" said Thompson. "Which he was hoppin' through that window there—" here he indicated the middle one of three in the side of the room—"when I drawed an' missed. I only had time for the one shot."

AT THIS there was a sudden scrabbling behind the bar. It was McFluke, trying to retreat through the doorway into the back room and being prevented from accomplishing his purpose by Racey Dawson, who at the innkeeper's first panic-stricken movement had vaulted the bar and grabbed him by the neck.

"None o' that now," cautioned Racey Dawson, his right hand flashing down and up, as McFluke, finding that escape was out of the question, made a desperate snatch at the knife-handle protruding from his boot-leg.

The saloon-keeper reacted immediately to the cold menace of the gun-muzzle pressing against the top of his spinal column. He straightened sullenly. Racey, transferring the gun-muzzle to the small of McFluke's back, stooped swiftly, drew out McFluke's knife and tossed it through a window.

"You won't be needin' that again," said Racey Dawson. "Help yoreself, Kansas."

Which the deputy promptly proceeded to do by snapping a pair of handcuffs round the thick McFluke wrists.

"What the —— yuh tryin' to do?" bawled McFluke in a rage. "I ain't done nothin'! You can't prove I done nothin'! You——"

"Shut up!" interrupted Kansas Casey, giving the handcuffs an expert twitch that wrenched a groan out of McFluke. "Provin' anythin' takes time. We got time. You got time. What more do yuh want?"

The efficient deputy towed the saloon-keeper round the bar and out into the bar-room. He faced him about in front of Jake Rule. The sheriff fixed him with a grim stare.

"What did yuh try to run for, Mac?" he demanded.

"I had business outdoors," grumbled McFluke.

"What kind of business?"

"What's that to you? You ain't got no license to grab a-hold o' me an' stop me from transactin' my legitimate business wherever an' whenever I feel like it."

"You seem to know more about it than I do. Alla same, unless you feel like tellin' me exactly what all yore hurry was for, we'll have to hold yuh for a while. Yo're shore it didn't have nothin' to do with yore sayin' the stranger run out the door an' Thompson sayin' he jumped through the window?"

"Why, shore I am," grunted McFluke.

"Glad to hear that. But how is it you an' Thompson seen the same thing different ways? It's a cinch the stranger, not bein' twins, didn't use both the door an' the window. Yo're shore he run out the door, Mac?"

"Shore I am. I seen him, I tell yuh." But McFluke's tone rang flat.

"Punch," said the sheriff to Thompson, who, in company with every one else in the room, had crowded round the sheriff and the prisoner, "Punch, how did the stranger who shot Dale leave the room?"

"Through the window, like I said," Thompson declared defiantly. "Ask anybody. They all seen him. Mac's drunk or crazy."

"Yo're a liar!" snarled McFluke. "I tell yuh he run out the door."

"Aw, close yore trap," requested Thompson with contempt. "You ain't packin' no gun."

"Lanpher," said the sheriff, "how did the murderer get away?"

"Through the window," was the prompt reply of the 88 manager.

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The sheriff asked Harpe, Coffin, Tweezy and the others who had been present at the killing, for their versions. In every case, each had seen eye-to-eye with Thompson. The evidence was overwhelmingly against the saloon-keeper. But he, a glint of fear in his hard blue eyes, stuck to his original statement, swearing that all the men were liars and he alone was telling the truth.

Racey, standing a little back from the crowd, pulled out his tobacco-bag. But his fingers must have been all thumbs at the moment for he dropped it on the floor. He stooped to retrieve it. The movement brought his eyes within a yard of the body of Dale. And now he saw that which he had not previously taken note of—an abrasion across the knuckles of Dale's right hand. Not only that, but the hand, which was lying over the left hand on the body's breast, showed an odd lumpiness at the knuckles of the first and second fingers.

Racey stuffed his tobacco-bag into his vest pocket and knelt beside the body. It was cold, of course, but had not yet completely stiffened. He laid the two hands side by side and compared them. The left hand was as it should be—no lumpiness, bruises or any discoloration other than grime. But now that the two hands were side by side the difference in the right hand was most apparent.

Certainly it was badly bruised across the knuckles and the skin was broken, too. Furthermore there was that odd lumpiness about the knuckles of the first and second fingers, a lumpiness that gave the knuckles almost the appearance of being double.

He picked up the dead hand and gingerly fingered the lumpy knuckles. Then in a flash of thought it came to him. The hand was broken.

HE RAISED his head and looked across the room. And as it chanced he looked across the packed shoulders and between the peering heads of the crowd straight into the face of McFluke and the black eye adorning that face.

He rose to his feet and pushed his way through the crowd to the side of the sheriff.

"Can I ask a question?" said he to the officer.

"Shore," nodded the sheriff. "Many as you like."

"Thompson," Racey said, but watching McFluke the while, "did Dale have any trouble here with anybody besides the stranger?"

"Not as I know of," came the reply after a moment's hesitation.

"He didn't have any fuss with anybody," spoke up Luke Tweezy.

"I was talkin' to Thompson," Racey reminded the lawyer. "When I wanna ask you any questions I'll let you know."

"Huh," Luke contented himself with grunting, and subsided.

"No fuss a-tall, Thompson?" resumed Racey.

"Nary a fuss."

"An' you was here alla time Dale was here?"

"I was here before Dale come, an' I was still here when Dale—went away."

"In the same room with him?"

"In this room, yeah. In the same room with him alla time. Shore."

"Then if Dale had had a riot with anybody else but the stranger man you'd 'a' knowed it."

"You betcha. He didn't have no trouble, only with the stranger."

"Did anybody else have any trouble with anybody while you was here?"

At this Thompson frowned. Where were Racey's questions leading him? Was it a trap? Knowing Racey as he did, he feared the worst. He would have liked to leave the question unanswered. But this was impossible. As it was, he was delaying his answer longer than good sense warranted. Both Jake Rule and Kansas Casey were staring at him fixedly. Racey regarded him steadily, a slight and sinister smile lurking at the corner of his mouth.

"Well," prompted Racey, "you'd oughta be able to tell us whether there was any other fights while you was here."

"They wasn't," plunged Thompson. "Everythin' was salubrious till Dale started his battle."

"An' when did you get here?" pursued Racey.

"Oh, I'd been here all night."

"An' you dunno of any other brush except the one between Dale an' the stranger?"

"I done said so forty times," Thompson declared peevishly. "How many times have I gotta repeat it?"

"As many times as yo're asked," put in the sheriff sharply.

"Didja see anybody get hurt—have a

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accident or somethin' while you was here, Thompson?" Racey bored on.

Thompson shook an impatient head. "Nobody got hurt or had a accident."

"Then," said Racey, turning suddenly on McFluke, "how did you get that black eye?"

CHAPTER XXI

GONE AWAY.

McFLUKE'S eyes flickered at the question. His body appeared to sink inward. Then he straightened and flung back his wide shoulders and glowered at Racey Dawson.

"I ran into a door this mornin'," said the saloon-keeper in a tone of the utmost confidence.

"Oh, you ran into a door, did you?" Racey observed sweetly. "An' what particular door did you run into?"

"The front door."

"That one?" Racey indicated the door of the bar-room.

"That one."

"We'll just take a look at that door."

Accompanied by the deeply interested sheriff, who was beginning to sniff his quarry like the old bloodhound he was, Racey crossed to the bar-room door. He looked at the door. He looked at the sheriff. The sheriff looked only at the door.

"Door's opened back flat against the wall, Mac," said the sheriff. "Was she like this when you ran into her?"

"Course not," was the heated reply. "She was swingin' open."

Racey squatted down on the floor. "Lookit here, sheriff."

The sheriff stooped and regarded the wooden wedge under the door that jammed it fast. Racey drew a finger across the top of the wedge. He held up the finger-tip for the sheriff's inspection. The tip was black with the dust of weeks.

"That door has been wedged back all this hot weather," said Racey gently. "Look at the dust under the door on both sides of the wedge, too. Bet that wedge ain't been out of place for a month."

Softly as he spoke McFluke heard him. "—— you. I tell you that door was opened this mornin'! I hit my head on it! Ask 'em all! Ask anybody! Jack, lookit here——"

"I didn't see yuh hit yore head on the door," interrupted Jack Harpe. "Maybe yuh did—I dunno."

Racey raised a quick head as Jack Harpe spoke. Quite plainly he saw Jack Harpe accompany his words with a slight lowering of his left eyelid. Racey glanced at McFluke. He saw the defiant expression depart from the McFluke countenance and a look of unmistakable relief take its place.

Racey dropped his head. The sheriff was speaking.

"Mac," he was saying, "yo're lyin'. Yo're lyin' as fast as a hoss can trot. You never got yore black eye on this door. I dunno why yo're sayin' yuh did, but I'm gonna find out. Till——"

"You won't have far to go to find out," struck in Racey Dawson. "I know how he got his black eye."

"How?" demanded the sheriff, his grizzled eyebrows drawing together.

"Dale gave it to him," was the answer, pat and pithy.

"He did not!" The saloon-keeper began to roar instantly and had to be quieted by Kansas Casey.

When order was restored Racey explained his deductions. The sheriff listened in silence. Then he went to the body of the dead man and examined the bruised and broken right hand.

"I'm tellin yuh," declared Racey with finality, "he hit somebody when he broke that hand."

"He might 'a' broke it when he fell after bein' shot," put in Luke Tweezy.

The sheriff shook his head. "He couldn't fall hard enough to break them bones as bad as that. It's like Racey says. Question is, who did he hit? McFluke's eye an' McFluke's lies are a good enough answer for me."

"You'll have to prove it!" snapped Luke Tweezy.

"I expect we'll do that, Luke," the sheriff said calmly. "Have you agreed on a verdict, judge?"

"We had," replied Dolan. "We was about satisfied that a plain 'killin' by a person unknown,' was as good as any, but I expect now we'll change it to murder with the recommendation that McFluke be arrested on suspicion. Whadda you say, boys?"

"Shore," chorused the "boys," and hiccupped like so many bull-frogs.

"Whu-why not lul-let the shush-shpicion

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shlide," suggested one bright spirit, "an' cuc-convict him right now an' lul-lynch him after shupper whu-when it's cool?"

"No," vetoed Dolan, "it can't be did. He's gotta be indicted an' held for the grand jury at Piegan City. I ain't allowed to try murder cases."

"Tut-too bad," mourned the bright spirit, and refused to be comforted.

"Can I take him now, judge?" inquired Chuck Morgan, referring to the dead man.

"Any time," nodded Dolan.

Racey Dawson, whose eyes that day were missing nothing, saw that Jack Harpe was looking steadily at Luke Tweezy. Luke's nod was barely perceptible.

"Where was you thinkin' of takin' him, Chuck?" was Tweezy's query.

"Moccasin Spring," Chuck replied laconically.

"I wouldn't if I was you," said Luke Tweezy. "Better save trouble by takin' him to yore house."

It was coming now—the answer to one puzzle at least. Racey was sure of it. He was not disappointed.

"An' why had I better take him to my house?" demanded Chuck.

"Because the ranch at Moccasin Spring don't belong to the Dale family any more," Tweezy explained smoothly. "Dale has turned over the place to Lanpher an' me."

"It's a —— lie!" declared Chuck.

Tweezy smiled. He was a lawyer, not a fighter. Names signified nothing in his greasy life.

"It's no lie," he tossed back. "You know Lanpher an' me bought the mortgage on the Dale place from the Marysville bank. The mortgage is due in a couple of days. Dale didn't have the money to satisfy the mortgage. We was gonna foreclose. In order to save trouble all round he made the ranch over to us."

"You mean to tell me Dale done that just to save trouble?" burst out Racey. "Just because he liked you two fellers an' wanted to make it as easy as possible for yuh? Aw ——, Tweezy. Aw —— again. Yo're as poor a liar as yore side-kicker McFluke."

Tweezy smiled once more and drew forth a long and shiny pocketbook from the inner pocket of his vest. From the pocketbook he extracted a legal-looking document. Which document he handed to Sheriff Rule.

"Read her off, Jake," requested Luke Tweezy.

THE sheriff read aloud the lines of writing. Shorn of the impressive terms so beloved of law and lawyers, the document set forth that in consideration of being allowed to retain all his live-stock, wagons and household goods, instead of merely the fixed number of cattle, horses and wagons, and those specified household articles, exempt under the law from seizure, Dale voluntarily released to the mortgagors, without the formality of foreclosure proceedings, the mortgaged property comprising six hundred and forty acres as described hereinafter, *et cetera*.

The document was signed by Dale and witnessed by Doc Coffin and Honey Hoke.

The sheriff held the paper out to Chuck Morgan.

"This Dale's signature, Chuck?"

Chuck Morgan examined the signature closely and long.

"Looks like it," he said hesitatingly.

"It's his signature all right," spoke up Honey Hoke. "I saw him sign it."

"Me too," said Doc Coffin.

"Paper's dated today," said the sheriff. "How long before he was killed did Dale sign it, Luke?"

"About a hour," replied Tweezy.

"It's made out in yore writin', ain't it?" went on the sheriff.

"Shore," nodded Luke. "All but the signature. So, yuh see, Chuck," he continued, turning to Morgan, "you might as well pack him to yore house. We intend to take possession immediately."

"You do, huh?" said Chuck. "You try it, thassall I gotta say. You try it."

"I'd admire to see you drive them women out of their home on the strength of that paper, Tweezy," remarked Racey.

"Sheriff, I'll make out eviction-papers immediately an' Judge Dolan will have you serve them on the Dale family." Thus Luke Tweezy, blustering.

"That's yore privilege," said the sheriff, "an' I'll have to serve 'em, I s'pose. But only in the regular course of business, Luke. I'm mighty busy just now. Yore eviction-notice will have to take its turn."

"My punchers will throw 'em out then," averred Lanpher.

"They ain't nary a one of 'em would gorm up their paws on a job like that for you, Lanpher," Alicran stated in no uncertain tones. "If you got any dirty work to do you'll do it yoreself."

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"Yo're—" began the 88 manager, and stopped suddenly

"What was you gonna say?" Alicran's voice cut sharply across the general silence.

Lanpher controlled himself by an effort. Or perhaps it was not such an effort after all. It may have been that he remembered the object-lesson of the severed branch of the wild-currant-bush. At any rate he did not pursue further the subject of the 88 cowboys cast as an eviction-gang.

"I'll talk to you later, Alicran," said he in a tone he strove to make grimly menacing, but which actually imposed upon no one, least of all the truculent Alicran.

"We won't need yore boys, Lanpher," said Racey. "The sheriff will attend to it."

"Lookit here, Tweezy," said Judge Dolan, slouching to the front of the crowd. "Are you gonna run them women off thataway after this?" Here the judge jerked his head backward in the direction of the body.

"Why not?" Tweezy demanded sulkily. "We got a right to."

"It don't always pay to stand on our rights, Luke," suggested the judge. "I'd go a li'l easy if I was you."

"You ain't me," said Tweezy rudely.

"Which is somethin' I gotta be grateful for," the judge returned. "But alla same, Luke, I'd scratch my head an' think how this here is gonna look. Here Dale gives you this paper, an' a hour later he's cashed. Of course, it looks like his signature, an' you got witnesses who say it's his signature, but—" The judge paused and gravely contemplated Luke Tweezy.

"I'll tell yuh what it looks like to me," announced Racey in a loud, unsympathetic tone. "The whole deal's too smooth. She's so smooth she's slick, like a counterfeit dollar. You an' Lanpher are a couple o' ——thieves, Tweezy."

But the sheriff's gun was out first.

"None of that, Lanpher," he cautioned. "They ain't gonna be no lockin' horns here today. That goes for you too, Racey."

"I don't need to pull no gun," Racey declared contemptuously. "All I'd have to use is my fingers on that feller. He never went after his gun till he seen you pull yores. He ain't got any nerve, that's all that's the matter with him."

Lanpher snarled curses at this. He yearned for the daredevil courage sufficient to risk all on a single throw by pulling his gun left-handed and sending a bullet smack through the scornful face of Racey Dawson. But it was precisely as Racey said. He did not have the nerve. With half a dozen drinks under his belt he undoubtedly would have made an attempt to clear his honor. But he was not carrying the requisite amount of liquor. Lanpher snarled another string of oaths.

"If I didn't have my right arm in a sling—" he began.

"I guess," interrupted the sheriff, "this will be about all. Lanpher, yore hoss is outside. Git on an' git out."

CHAPTER XXII

A CHECK

"LOOKIT here, judge," said Racey earnestly. "Do you mean to say yo're gonna let the sheriff serve them eviction-papers?"

Judge Dolan elevated his feet upon his desk and tilted back his chair before replying.

"Racey," he said, teetering gently, "I gotta do what the law says in this thing."

"Then yo're gonna sic the sheriff on, huh?"

"I ain't doin' no siccin', not me. Luke Tweezy's the boy you mean."

"But the law makes you back up Luke."

"In this case it does."

"Then it's a —— of a law that lets a feller take away the home of two women."

"They's lots o' times," observed Dolan judicially, "when I think she's a —— of a law too. But what yuh gonna do? Under the law one man's word is as good as another's till he's proved a liar. An' two men's words are better than one, an' so on. An' so far nobody ain't proved Doc Coffin an' Honey Hoke an' Luke Tweezy are liars."

"Of course we know they are," protested Racey.

"Not legally. You gotta remember that knowin' a man is a liar is one thing, an' bein' able to prove it is another breed of cat."

"Then they ain't nothin' to be done short of rubbin' out Lanpher an' Tweezy?"

"An' what good would wipin' out either or both of them do? Beyond Lanpher an' Tweezy are their heirs an' assigns, whoever they may be. You can't go down the line an' abolish 'em all."

"I s'pose not," grumbled Racey.

"Of course not. It ain't reasonable. You

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don't wanna bull along regardless like a bufflehead in this, Racey. You wanna use yore brains a few. They'll always go farther than main strength. You got brains, an' you can bet you'll need every single one of 'em if you wanna get to the bottom of this business."

"Under the circumstances then, what's yore advice, judge?"

"I ain't got no particular advice to give," replied Dolan promptly. "I'm a judge, not a lawyer, but I'm free to say even if I was a lawyer I dunno exactly what I'd do or where I'd begin."

Racey nodded. He didn't see exactly where to begin, either.

"Lookit, judge," he said at last. "Can't you sort of delay the proceedin's for a while?"

"I'll do what I can," assented Dolan, "but I can't keep it up forever. I'm sworn to obey the law an' see that it is obeyed. An' if Luke Tweezy's paper can't be proved a forgery certain an' soon, they's only one thing for me to do an' one thing for the Dales to do. I'm sorry, but that's the way it stands under the law."

It was then that the door-latch clicked and one entered without knocking. It was Luke Tweezy. Beyond the merest flicker of a glance he did not acknowledge the presence of Racey Dawson. He nodded perfunctorily to Dolan.

"Morning', judge," said he. "Are the papers ready for the sheriff yet?"

"Not yet, Luke, not yet," Dolan assured him blandly. "I ain't had time to get at 'em."

"When you gonna get at 'em?"

"Soon as I get time."

"But lookit here, judge. We're bein' delayed. We wanna get the Dales off their ranch soon as we can."

"Off *their* ranch is shore the truth," struck in Racey. "You do tell it sometimes, don't yuh, Luke?"

But Luke Tweezy was not to be drawn that morning. He focused his eyes and attention steadily on Judge Dolan.

"We wanna take possession soon as we can," persisted Luke Tweezy.

"Shore yuh do," said the judge heartily. "No reason why yuh shouldn't wanna as I know of."

"If yuh can't see yore way to gettin' at this business within a reasonable time I'll have to sue out a mandatory injunction against you, judge, an'——"

Dolan smiled wintrily. "What judge are you figurin' on to grant this injunction?"

Luke Tweezy was silent.

"You don't expect me to grant a mandatory injunction against myself, do yuh?" pursued Dolan.

"I can go to Judge Allison at Marysville or to Piegan City, an' I guess——"

"I guess not," interrupted the judge. "Judge Allison, as you know, is a Federal judge, an' these here eviction-proceedin's are territorial business. An' furthermore, lemme point out that the Piegan City court ain't got no jurisdiction in this case."

"Why not?"

"Because the case ain't come to a hearin' yet. That's why. You oughta know that, Luke. Yo're a lawyer."

"Alla same—" began Luke.

"Alla same nothin'!" declared Judge Dolan. "After eviction-proceedin's have been started, an' if you don't have no luck in gettin' them women off the place, then you can apply to this court for redress. I'll set a date for a hearin'. After the hearin' if you get a notion in yore numskull that I ain't doin' you right you can apply to the Piegan City court for all the —— mandatory injunctions you feel like an' be —— to you. Is they any further business you got with me, Luke, or any more points of law you wanna be instructed on? 'Cause if they ain't, here's you, there's the door, an' right yonder is outside."

Luke Tweezy departed abruptly.

Dolan laughed harshly as the door slammed.

"He can't bluff me, the chucklehead. He knowed he couldn't sue out no mandatory injunction yet, knowed it —— well, but he didn't think I knowed it, —— his ornery soul."

"Oh, he's slick, Luke Tweezy is," said Racey Dawson, "but like most slick gents he thinks everybody else is a fool."

"He makes a mistake once in a while," grunted Dolan.

At which Racey looked up sharply.

"A mistake," he repeated. "There's an idea. I wonder if he has made any mistake."

"Who ain't?" nodded Dolan. "Luke's made plenty, I'll bet."

"I dunno about plenty," doubted Racey. "One would be enough."

Dolan rasped a hand across his stubbly chin.

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"One would be enough," he admitted. "If yuh could find the one."

"It wouldn't have to be a mistake havin' to do with this particular case either, would it?"

"Not necessarily. Of course it would be better to trip him up on this case, but if you can get hold of somethin' else Luke has done that can be proved anyways shady it would be four aces an' the joker. Luke would have to pull in his horns about this mortgage. An' if I know Luke, he'd do it. He's got nerve, but it ain't cold enough nor witless enough to go up against the shore thing."

"If only McFluke would talk. He knows the ins an' outs o' this business."

Dolan nodded. "Shore as yo're a foot high Dale gave him that black eye."

"An' shore as *yo're* a foot high he downed Dale."

"I guess likely. But circumstantial evidence is amazin' queer. You can't ever tell how the jury's gonna take it. But anyway we got McFluke, an' he'll do to start in on."

ENTERED then Kansas Casey with a serious face.

"McFluke has sloped," said he without prelimina-y.

"What!" cried Judge Dolan.

But it was characteristic of Racey Dawson that he did not say "What!" He asked "How?"

"'Cause the jail has burned down," said Kansas. "Yuh know we had to put him in yore warehouse, judge, as the next strongest place, an' they dug him out."

"Dug him out?" Thus Judge Dolan.

"That's what they did."

"'They'! 'They'! Who's 'they'?" Again Judge Dolan.

"If I knowed who 'they' was," Kansas replied, "I'd dump 'em just too quick. Way I know it's a 'they' is because the job of diggin' is bigger than a one-man job."

"We'll go look into this," Dolan exclaimed wrathfully, and reached for his hat.

"He'd never 'a' been pulled out of the calaboose so easy," said Kansas, as he led Dolan and Racey up the street to the rear of the Dolan warehouse, "but yore foundation logs ain't sunk more'n six inches, an' diggin' under an' in was a cinch."

"But why didn't yuh handcuff this sport to a roof-stanchion inside?" demanded the judge.

"We did, man, we did. We got log-chain an' the biggest pair of handcuffs in our stock an' we ironed McFluke by the ankles to a stanchion in the middle of the warehouse. Besides that his hands was handcuffed, an' no matter how he stretched he couldn't reach nothin'. We seen to that."

"But, my —— how in —— did they have time to file through that log-chain or them cuffs? A log chain ain't made of wire an' them cuffs is all special steel."

"They didn't file neither the chain nor the cuffs," explained Kansas wearily. "They unlocked the cuffs."

"Unlocked 'em, huh? Where'd they get the key? Lose one of yores, did yuh?"

"Ours is all safe. They must 'a' had a key. Anyway, there's the handcuffs wide open when I found McFluke gone this mornin'."

Dolan pulled out his watch.

"Nine o'clock," said he. "When did you first find Mac was gone, Kansas?"

"When I took his breakfast in, less'n five minutes ago."

"How come yuh went to the warehouse so late?"

"Well," said Kansas, somewhat shamefacedly, "we didn't lock him up in the warehouse till one o'clock this mornin', an' I figured a li'l extra sleep wouldn't do him no harm."

"Or a l'il extra sleep wouldn't do yoreself no harm neither, huh?"

"Maybe I did sleep later than usual," admitted Kansas.

"I guess you did," said Dolan. "I guess you did. An' Jake too. Told anybody else about this?"

"Only Jake."

They had left the street while they talked and walked down the long side wall of the warehouse. Now they turned the corner and saw, heaped against a foundation log, a pile of freshly dug dirt. Beyond the dirt-pile gaped the mouth of a hole leading beneath the log. The hole was quite large enough for a large man to crawl through it without difficulty.

Judge Dolan got down on his hands and knees and peered into the hole. Then he crawled down into it and pawed his way through.

"That's what you get for not walkin' in by the front door in the first place, Kansas,"

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grinned Racey. "Root hog or die, feller, root hog or die."

Swearing under his breath, Kansas went to ground like a badger. His broad shoulders did not scrape the sides of the hole. Observing which, Racey knew that it must have been an easy matter for McFluke to crawl through, for the saloon-keeper's shoulders, wide as they were, were not so broad as those of Kansas Casey by a good inch and a half.

"That hole is four or five inches wider than necessary," ruminated Racey, preparing to follow the deputy. "I wonder why. Yep, I shore wonder why. Here they are in a harris of a hurry an' they take time to make a hole big enough for two men almost. Maybe they robbed the warehouse too."

He suggested as much to Dolan when he joined the latter within.

"No," said Dolan, sweeping with a glance the stacks of cases and crates that half-filled the single floor of the warehouse. "No, I don't think they's nothin' missin'. Who'd steal truck like this here, anyway? It ain't valuable enough. Where's Jake, Kansas?"

"I left him here when I went after you," replied the deputy. "Guess this is him," he added, as a key turned in the front door.

It was the sheriff. He shut the door behind him and advanced toward the little group gathered about the stanchion.

"This is a great note, Jake," said Dolan, eying the sheriff severely. "Can't you make out to hang on to yore prisoners no more?"

"Hang on to ——!" snapped the sheriff. "Short of sleepin' in here with him, I done all that could be expected. I put Shorty Rumbold on as guard, an' Shorty——"

"Where's Shorty?"

"Went to the Starlight for a drink. He'll be along in a minute."

"Maybe he went to sleep," suggested Dolan.

"Not Shorty," denied the sheriff with a decisive shake of his head. "I've used Shorty before. He don't go to sleep on duty, Shorty don't. Here he is now."

Entered then Shorty Rumbold, a tall, lean-bodied man with a twinkling eye and a square chin.

"Shorty," said Dolan, "Jake says he put you on guard here last night."

"Not here," said Shorty, always painfully meticulous as to facts. "Outside."

"Where outside?"

"Just outside. I sat on the door-step all night."

"An' didn't you go round to the back once even?"

"I didn't think they was any use. They's no door in the back, an' the logs are forty inches through, some of 'em. I never thought of 'em gopherin' under this-away."

"I guess the sheriff didn't either," said Dolan, with a glance of strong disapproval at the sheriff. "You didn't hear nothin', huh? Yo're shore of that?"

"Shore I am. If I'd heard anythin' I'd 'a' scouted round to see what made the noise."

"Maybe you went to sleep."

"Not me." The twinkle in Shorty's eyes was replaced by a frosty stare. "I don't sleep on duty, judge."

"That's what the sheriff said, Shorty. But, how in —— they could dig that tunnel an' not make *some* noise I don't see."

"I don't either," Shorty Rumbold admitted frankly. "But I didn't hear a single suspicious sound either inside or outside the jail the whole night."

"Did you hear any noise a-tall?" asked Racey Dawson.

"Only when some drunk gents had a argument out in front of the dance-hall. You wouldn't help hearin' 'em. They made noise enough to hear 'em a mile."

"How long did the argument last?"

"Oh, maybe a hour—a long time for a plain argument without no shootin' or nothin'."

"Did they call each other any fightin' names?" pressed on Racey.

"Plenty."

"An' no shootin'?"

"Nary a shot."

"Didn't that hit you as kind of odd?"

"It did at the time sort of."

"Recognize any of the voices?"

Shorty Rumbold shook his head.

"They was all too hoarse an' loud."

"That's the how of it, judge," said Racey to Dolan. "That's why Shorty didn't hear no sounds of diggin'. The drunk gents a-rowin' together for a long time like that without no shootin' proves they was doin' it on purpose to keep Shorty from hearin' anythin' else."

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THE sheriff swore. "I heard them fellers too," he said. "They done woke me up with their bellerin' an' I had a job gettin' to sleep again. I guess Racey's right."

"I guess he is," assented the judge. "Now we know how they managed that part of it, where did they get the key to open the cuffs? Kansas says you ain't lost no keys, Jake."

"We got 'em all, every one. I don't believe they used a key. Them handcuff-locks was picked."

"Picked?"

"Picked. After Kansas went for you I found these here on the floor." Here he produced from a pocket a bent and twisted piece of baling-wire and a steel half-moon horse-collar needle.

"That's a number six needle," observed the sheriff, who invariably scented clues in the most unpromising objects. "An' the point's broke off."

"Number six is a common size," said Racey. "Most stores carry 'em. An' if the point didn't get broke off wigglin' round inside the lock it would be a wonder."

"Still it would take a mighty good man to open them locks with only bale-wire an' a harness-needle," said the sheriff hurriedly. "A expert, you bet."

"It don't matter whether he was a expert or not," said Dolan. "He opened them, an' the prisoner has skedaddled. That's the main thing. Jake, how about trailin' him?"

"How? They's tracks, a few of 'em, leadin' from the pile of dirt straight to the hard ground in front of the stage corrals. Beyond there they ain't no tracks. Trail 'em!. How you gonna trail 'em?"

"I dunno," replied Dolan, promptly passing the buck. "Yo're the sheriff. She's yore job. You gotta do somethin'. C'mon out."

The five men, Dolan and the sheriff arguing steadily, went out into the street. Racey walked thoughtfully in the rear. He was revolving in his mind what the sheriff had said about an expert. Of course it had been an expert. And experts in lock-picking in the cattle country are few and far between.

Racey decided that it would be a good idea for him to have a little talk on lock-picking with Peaches Austin. Not that he suspected the excellent Peaches of having picked those locks. But Peaches knew who had. Oh, most certainly Peaches knew who had.

CHAPTER XXIII

TAKING FENCES

"'LO Peaches."

Peaches Austin, standing at the Starlight bar, was raising a glass to his lips. But at the greeting he set down the liquor untasted, turned his head and looked into the face of Racey Dawson.

"Whatsa matter, Peaches?" inquired Racey. "You don't look glad to see me."

"I ain't," Peaches said frankly. "I don't give a —— about seein' you."

"I'm sorry," grieved Racey, edging closer to the gambler. "Peaches yo're breakin' my heart with them cruel words."

At this the bartender removed hastily to the other end of the bar. He sensed he knew not what, and he felt instead of curiosity a lively fear. Racey Dawson was the most unexpected sport.

Peaches looked nervously at Racey. A desperate resolve began to formulate itself in the brain of Peaches Austin. His right arm tensed. Slowly his hand slid toward the edge of the bar.

"Why no," said Racey, who had never been more wide-awake than at that moment, "I wouldn't do nothin' we'd all be sorry for, Peaches. That is, all of us but you yoreself. You might not be sorry—or anythin' else."

This was threatening language, plain and simple. But it was no bluff. Peaches knew that Racey meant every word he said. Peaches' right hand moved no farther.

"Peaches," said Racey, "le's go where we can have a li'l private talk."

"All right," Peaches acquiesced shortly, and left the saloon with Racey.

On the sidewalk they were joined by Swing Tunstall. The latter fell into step on the other side of Peaches Austin.

"Is he comin' too?" queried the gambler with a marked absence of cordiality in expression and tone.

"He is," answered Racey.

"I thought this talk was gonna be private."

"It is—only the three of us. We wouldn't think of lettin' anybody else horn in. You can rest easy, Peaches. We'll take care of you."

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The gambler didn't doubt it. His wicked heart sank accordingly. He knew that he had been a bad, bad boy, and he conceived the notion that Nemesis was rolling up her sleeves, all to his ultimate prejudice.

He perceived in front of the dance-hall Doc Coffin and Honey Hoke, and plucked up heart at once. But Racey saw the pair at the same time, and said, twitching Peaches by the sleeve—

"We'll turn off here, I guess."

Peaches turned perforce and accompanied Racey and Swing into the narrow space between the express-office and a log house. When they came out into the open Racey obliqued to the left and piloted his companion to a large log that lay among empty tin cans, almost directly in the rear of and about fifty yards away from Dolan's warehouse.

"Here's a good place," said Racey, indicating the log. "Good seats, plenty of fresh air, an' nobody round to bother us. Si' down, Peaches."

Peaches sat as requested. The two friends seated themselves on his either hand. Racey laughed gently.

"Doc Coffin an' Honey looked kind of surprized to see you with us," he remarked with enjoyment, "didn't they, Peaches?"

"I didn't notice," lied Peaches.

"It don't matter," nodded Racey. "See that pile of dirt over against the back wall of Dolan's warehouse, Peaches?"

"I ain't blind."

"No, then maybe you've heard how an' why it come to be dug an' all?"

"I ain't deaf, neither."

Racey smiled his approval. "I always said you had all yore senses except the common variety, Peaches."

"Hop ahead with yore private talk," grunted the badgered gambler.

"Gimme time, gimme time. It don't cost anythin'. Whadda you think of that hole, Peaches?"

"Good big hole," replied Peaches conservatively.

"Too big—that is, too big for just McFluke, or for any other feller the size of McFluke."

"What of it?"

"Don't be in a hurry, Peaches, an' you'll last longer. Did you know Mac's handcuffs were picked open?"

"How—picked open?"

"Whoever opened 'em didn't use a key," Racey explained. "They was picked open with a piece of balin'-wire an' a collar-needle."

"I heard that."

"I thought maybe so. But did yuh ever think that a feller has got to have a good an' clever pair of hands to pick a lock with only a collar-needle an' balin'-wire?"

"All that stands to reason," admitted Peaches.

"There can't be a great many fellers like that. No, not many—not around here anyway. You'll find such sports in the big cities mainly."

"Yeah," chipped in Swing Tunstall, staring hard at Peaches, "I'll bet you a hundred even they ain't more than one or two such experts in the whole territory."

"Whadda you think, Peaches?" inquired Racey.

"Swing may be right," said Peaches, preserving a wooden countenance. "I dunno."

"Shore about that?" Sharply.

"Shore I'm shore. Why not?"

"You looked sort of funny when you said it. Well, then, Peaches, we'll go back to our hole yonder. It's reasonable to suppose that fellers hustlin' to dig it an' without any too much time wouldn't make it any bigger than they had to. How about it, huh?"

"Guess so, maybe."

"Aw right, I told yuh a while ago the hole was too big for McFluke. Why was it made too big for McFluke?"

"—— if I know."

"So as to let in the feller who was to pick open Mac's handcuffs."

"Well, what does that prove?"

"It proves that the expert who set Mac loose was a bigger man across the shoulders than McFluke. Now who-all around here, besides Kansas Casey, is wider across the shoulders than McFluke?"

Peaches wrinkled his forehead.

"I dunno," he said after a space.

"Think again, Peaches, think again. Don't you know anybody who's bigger sidewise than McFluke?"

"I don't. Mac's the biggest man across the shoulders I ever seen."

"Good enough, Peaches. I've found out what I wanted. I had a fair idea before, but now I know. I hear you was actin' boisterous an' noisy out front of the dance-hall last night."

"What of it?"

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"Oh, nothin', nothin' a-tall. Only I'd think it over—I'd think everythin' over good an' careful, an' after I'd done that I'd do what looked like the best thing to do—under the circumstances. That's all, Peaches. You can go now. I think yore friends are lookin' for you. I seen Doc Coffin peekin' round the corner of the dance-hall a couple of times."

Peaches arose and faced Dawson and Swing Tunstall.

"I—" he began, and stopped.

"I—" prompted Swing.

"I what?" smiled Racey. "Speak right out, Peaches. Don't yuh care if yuh do hurt our feelin's. They're tough. They can stand it. Say what's on yore mind."

But Peaches did not say what was in his mind. He turned about and walked hurriedly away.

"So it is Jack Harpe who picked the cuffs," murmured Racey. "Peaches, old-timer, I didn't think you'd be so easy."

"Neither did I," said Swing. "An' him a gambler. No wonder he ain't doin' so well."

CHAPTER XXIV

DIPLOMACY

WORRIED Mrs. Dale raised a work-scarred hand and pushed back a lock of gray hair that had fallen over one eye.

"It's a forgery," she said wretchedly. "I know it's a forgery. He—he wouldn't sign such a paper. I know he wouldn't."

Molly Dale, all unmindful of Racey Dawson sitting in a chair tilted back against the wall, slipped around the table and slid her arm about her mother's waist.

"There, there, ma," she soothed, pulling her mother's head against her firm young shoulder. "Don't you fret. It will come out all right. You'll see. You mustn't worry this way. Can't you believe what Racey says? Try, dear, try."

But unhappy Mrs. Dale was beyond trying. She saw the home for which she had worked and slaved to maintain taken from her and herself and her daughter turned out-of-doors. There was no help for it. There was no hope. The future was pot-black. She broke down and wept.

"Oh, oh," she sobbed, "if only I'd watched him closer that day. But I was washing and I sort of forgot about him for a spell, and when I'd got the clothes on the line he wasn't anywhere in sight, and—and it's all my fuf-fault."

This was too much for Racey Dawson. He got up and went out. Savagely he pulled his hat over his eyes and strode to where his horse stood in the shade of a cottonwood. But he did not pick up the trailing reins. For as he reached the animal he saw approaching across the flat the figures of a horse and rider. And the man was Luke Tweezy.

With the sight of Mrs. Dale's tears fresh in his memory and the rage engendered thereby galvanizing his brain, he went to meet Mr. Tweezy.

"Howdy, Racey," said the lawyer, pulling up.

"Whadda you want?" demanded Racey, halting a scant yard from Luke Tweezy's left leg.

"I come to see Mrs. Dale," replied Tweezy, his leathery features wrinkling in a grimace intended to pass for a propitiating smile.

Racey's stare was venomous.

"Tweezy," he drawled, "I done told you somethin' about admirin' to see you put them women off this ranch, didn't I?"

"Oh, you was just a li'l hasty. I understand. That's all right. I've done forgot all about it."

"So I see. So I see. I'm remindin' you of it. After this, Luke, I'd hobble my memory if I was you, then it won't go strayin' off thisaway an' get you into trouble."

"Trouble?"

Racey did not deign to repeat. He nodded simply.

"I ain't got no gun," explained the lawyer.

"Alla more easy for me then. You can't shoot back."

Luke Tweezy choked. Choked and spat. "——," he began in a violent tone of voice.

"Careful, careful," cautioned Racey, promptly kicking the lawyer's horse in the ribs. "There's ladies in the house. You get a-holt of yore tongue."

Luke Tweezy obeyed the command literally. For, his horse going into the air with great briskness at the impact of Racey's toe, even as the puncher had intended it should, he, Luke Tweezy, bit his tongue so hard that he wept involuntary tears of keenest anguish.

"You stop that cussin'," resumed Racey,

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seizing the bridle short and yanking the bouncing horse to a standstill with a swerve and a jerk that almost unseated its rider. "You be careful how you talk, you —— hop-toad!"

"Leggo that bridle!" yammered Tweezy, almost distraught with anger. His tongue pained him exquisitely and he was otherwise physically shaken. "Leggo that bridle!"

"I'll let it go!" Racey grated through set teeth, and he let it go with a backward flip to the lower branches of the severe curb-bit that instantly sent the horse on its hind legs. If Luke Tweezy had not quick-wittedly smacked it between the ears with the butt of his quirt it would have continued the motion to a backfall and rolled its rider out.

"Tough Luck," mourned Racey, sorry to observe that Luke had contrived to ward off an accident. "I was expectin' to see that horn dislocate yore latest meal. If you ain't quite so set on goin' to the house you can flit."

"I wanna see Mrs. Dale," persisted the lawyer in a strangled voice. "I come to offer her money. I wanna do her a favor, can't you understand?"

"I can't," was the frank reply. "I can't see you doin' anybody a favor or givin' away any money. C'mon, get a-goin'."

It was then that the lawyer lifted his voice and shouted aloud for Mrs. Dale. Undoubtedly Racey would have done Tweezy a mischief had he been given time. But unfortunately Molly Dale came to the lawyer's rescue precisely as she had once come to the rescue of his partner in evil, the bulldozer Lanpher. As it was Racey had pulled Luke Tweezy partly from the saddle when Molly arrived and forced her defender to release his victim.

Reluctantly Racey dropped the leg he held and allowed Tweezy to come to earth on his hands and knees.

"What do you want?" inquired Molly, regarding Tweezy much as she would have regarded a poisonous reptile.

"I wanna see yore mother," snuffled Tweezy, applying his sleeve to his nose. He had in the mix-up smitten his swell fork with the organ in question and it had begun to bleed.

"Why?"

"I wanna pay her money to go away quietly," said Tweezy, switching from his sleeve to his handkerchief. "I——"

"Here she is," interrupted Molly. "Tell her."

"How do, ma'am," said Luke to the wet-eyed widow. "I guess it ain't necessary for me to go through a lot of explanations with you. You know what's what, an' you know we'll take possession just as soon as the sheriff serves the eviction-papers on you."

At this Racey Dawson made a noise in his throat. Molly laid cool fingers on his wrist.

"Steady, boy, steady," she whispered under her breath.

Despite the seriousness of the moment Racey's heart skipped a beat and the pleasantest shiver in the world ran about his body. "Boy!" she had called him. "Boy." Her hand was actually touching his own. He——

"I don't wanna be hard on you, Mis' Dale," resumed Luke, after an apprehensive glance at Racey Dawson. "I don't wanna be hard on anybody that's sittin' into a run of hard luck, but business is business, ma'am. You know that. An' after all I'm—we're only askin' for what we're by rights entitled to. We got title to this place fair an' square an'——"

"Title, huh?" struck in Racey, unable to keep silent. "Not yet you ain't."

"*S-s-sh*," breathed Molly, tightening her grip on his wrist.

"It's like I say, Mis' Dale," Luke Tweezy burred on from behind his handkerchief, "I ain't got any wish to add to yore troubles, an' so I got my partner to agree for me to give you five hundred dollars cash money if you'll pack up an' clear out quiet an' peaceful."

"Don't yuh do it, Mis' Dale!" urged Racey. "There's a trick in that offer."

"They ain't no trick!" contradicted Luke Tweezy vehemently. "I just wanna save trouble, thassall."

Save trouble! That had been Lanpher's reason for coming the day he rode through the garden. Save trouble indeed!

"If yo're so shore the sheriff is gonna serve them eviction-papers," said Racey as calmly as he could because of the warning pressure on his wrist, "if yo're so shore why are you givin' away five hundred?"

"Because I don't wanna be hard on Mis' Dale. Then again, I'll admit we wanna get in here soon as we can."

"You admit it, huh? That's a good one, that is. Don't you do it, Mis' Dale. You stand pat."

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"I don't want your five hundred dollars," said Mrs. Dale.

"Seven-fifty," climbed up Tweezy.

Mrs. Dale shook her head.

"No."

"One thousand," Tweezy raised his ante.

"Lemme throw him out, Mis' Dale?" begged Racey Dawson. "Just lemme throw him out, an' I'll guarantee he'll never bother you again."

Again Mrs. Dale shook her head, and the pressure on Racey's wrist increased.

"You mustn't touch him," said Mrs. Dale. "He'll go."

"Think it over," Tweezy blundered on. "One thousand dollars *gratis* cash money in yore hands if you'll leave at once."

"I'll wait a while," said Mrs. Dale. "Please go."

Luke Tweezy opened his mouth to speak. Racey broke from Molly's detaining grasp and stepped between him and Mrs. Dale, and Tweezy closed his mouth without speaking.

"You heard what she said," Racey drawled softly. "Git!"

And Tweezy got.

"DO YOU think the sheriff will put us out?" asked Mrs. Dale, twisting a corner of her apron between her hands.

"He'll take all the time to it he can," Racey evaded the direct reply. "But whatever happens don't think of takin' no offer like that of Tweezy's. It's a trick, thassall. No matter who comes to yuh nor what he offers don't you move till—Well anyway, Judge Dolan an' Jake Rule are with yuh from soda to hock, an' they'll do all they can to hold things at a standstill till I can fix it all up. You gotta remember that I know what you dunno, an' when I say that everything's gonna end fine an' daisy you better believe I know what I'm talkin' about."

Molly looked at him keenly.

"Racey, that's the third or fourth time you've said that. I wonder if you really have something up your sleeve."

"Of course I have," Racey insisted. "You wait. You'll see."

"What do you know? Tell us."

"Nev' mine an' I won't. It might spoil everythin' if I told yuh. You just gotta leave it to me."

He had definitely made his bluff. He would have to make good. And he no more knew how to make good in the business than the year-old baby busy with its toes. But ere this men have killed dragons and made wonders come to pass all for the sake of their ladies' eyes. Men as prosaic and matter-of-fact as the puncher, Racey Dawson. Quite so.

Half an hour after the departure of Luke Tweezy Mr. Saltoun and Tom Loudon rode in on lathered horses. They were, it seemed, journeying homeward from the 88, whither they had gone in an endeavor to persuade Lanpher and Tweezy to sell the Dale mortgage.

"Tweezy, huh?" said Racey. "He's just left here."

"He must 'a' rode like the devil," said Mr. Saltoun. "He was in the office with Lanpher when we left."

"I thought I noticed a feller off to the south of us as we come along," observed Loudon. "He was just a-boilin'. I only saw him the once as he slid by the mouth of a draw. Looked like he was tryin' to keep out o' sight. Rode a gray hoss."

"Tweezy rode a gray," nodded Racey.

"Him all right. What did he want here, Racey?"

"Offered Mis' Dale one thousand cold if she'd pull her freight."

"She ain't gonna do it, is she?" demanded the alarmed Mr. Saltoun.

Racey shook his head. "She's gonna stick."

"She must. —— yes. Them papers of Luke's are forged. I know they are."

"So does everybody else," put in Tom Loudon, "but if somethin' don't turn up —— quick—" He broke off, shaking a dubious head.

"Somethin' will," declared Racey, making his bluff a second time with an air of supreme confidence.

"You know somethin', Racey," prodded Mr. Saltoun, who prided himself on his perspicuity. "Whadda yuh know?"

"I ain't tellin' it," answered Racey coolly. "I ain't comin' back to the ranch today, neither."

"Oh, you ain't. Listen to the new owner, Tom."

"That's all right," said Racey. "If I'm gonna do the world any good I gotta have a free hand."

"You can have two of 'em," conceded Mr. Saltoun. "The bridle's off."

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"Aw right, I'll take Swing Tunstall," Racey hastened to say.

"I meant yore own two hands," demurred Mr. Saltoun.

"I know yuh did, but I meant the other kind. Listen, do you want Lanpher an' Tweezy to get this ranch?"

"—— it, no!"

"Then gimme Swing Tunstall."

"Take him. Need anybody else? Wouldn't yuh like all the rest of the outfit, an' me too?"

"My —— no. This is a job requirin' brains."

"Say, lookit here, Racey——"

"When you get to the ranch tell Swing to come along soon as he can," interrupted Racey. "I'll be expectin' him."

Tuckety-tuck! Tuckety-tuck! Somewhere beyond the cottonwood grove surrounding Moccasin Spring a galloping horse was coming in. A moment later horse and rider shot past the end of the cottonwood grove and bore down on the house.

"Marie!" exclaimed Racey.

"An' ridin' one of my hosses," observed Mr. Saltoun.

At that instant Marie caught sight of the three men and swerved her mount toward them.

"They said at the Bar S you was here," panted the lookout, pulling up in front of Racey Dawson. "So I borrowed a fresh hoss an' kep' on. Somethin's happened in Farewell, Racey. Swing Tunstall's shot."

"Downed?" Racey did not usually jump at conclusions, but Swing Tunstall was his friend.

Marie shook her tousled head.

"Nicked—shoulder an' leg. But it ain't their fault he wasn't rubbed out."

"Who done it?" demanded Racey.

"Doc Coffin."

"You said 'their.'"

"Honey Hoke bumped into Swing just as he went after his gun, so Swing couldn't get his gun out a-tall. Swing said Honey grabbed his wrist, but Peaches Austin an' Punch-the-breeze Thompson was on the other side in the way so none of the boys seen what happened to Swing exactly till after it had."

"Austin, Thompson, Hoke an' Coffin," said Racey. "What began the fuss?"

"Doc Coffin upset a glass of whisky over Swing's arm, an' then cussed him for gettin' his arm in the way."

"An' Swing called him a liar, huh?"

"An' a —— one, too," elaborated Marie.

"Put-up job." Gruffly Mr. Saltoun gave his opinion.

"Shore," Tom Loudon nodded gravely.

"Where are them four men now?" Racey asked quietly, looking at Marie.

"They were in the Starlight when I left town—*an' they weren't drinkin'*."

"No, they wouldn't be."

"An' the sheriff an' Kansas went to Dogville this mornin', an' the marshal is sick. I thought you ought to know. My ——, I thought yuh'd hear the news from somebody else before I got here an' go bustin' in regardless, an'——"

"I guess I'll go in all right," he told her with a slight smile, "but it won't be regardless."

With that he turned on a spurred heel and crossed springily to where his horse stood.

"Aw, the ——!" exclaimed Marie, looking helplessly at Tom Loudon and Mr. Saltoun. "An' he'll do it, too."

Then she "kissed" to her horse and rode into the cottonwood grove for a drink at the spring.

RACEY, sticking foot in stirrup, found Molly Dale at his elbow. She was looking at him the way women do when they either don't understand or think they understand only too well.

"Who is that woman?" asked Molly Dale.

"Huh?" Thus Racey, stupidly. He was thinking of his friend lying wounded in Farewell. "What woman you mean? . . . Oh, her, that's Marie, she's—she's lookout in the Happy Heart."

"Oh, yes, Marie. I—I've seen you with her—one evening when you and she were crossing the street and I drove past. I—I, yes indeed."

And as she spoke her eyes were very bright and her figure was stiffer than the proverbial poker, which was odd. And at the tail of her words she gave a stiff nod and hurried into the house. Which was odder. The species of nod and the hurry—both.

But Racey was in no mood to speculate on the idiosyncrasies of woman. Even *the* woman. So he topped his mount and rejoined Tom Loudon and Mr. Saltoun. They regarded him silently.

"I guess," said Racey, whirling an empty tobacco-bag by its draw-string, "I'll bor-

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row some of yore smokin', Tom. I'm plumb a-foot for tobacco at the present writin'."

Tom Loudon handed over his pouch without a word. But Mr. Saltoun was fidgety. Unlike his son-in-law, he felt that he must speak.

"Lookit here, Racey," he said hurriedly, "you ain't goin' to Farewell alone, are yuh?"

"Why no, certainly not," Racey replied solemnly. "I'm goin' to send word to Yardley for the troops. —— bells, there's only four of them, man!"

"Yes, well— Who's this? One of our boys?"

But it was not one of "our" boys. It was Rack Slimson, the proprietor of the Starlight Saloon. But he was riding in from the direction of the Bar S.

He rode soberly, as one bound on a journey of length. Even as Marie had done, he glimpsed the three men and turned his horse toward them. Ten feet from the flank of Racey Dawson's mount he pulled in and nodded. There was spite—spite and something else in the gaze he fixed on Racey Dawson.

"Yore friend's hurt," said he. "Got in a fight."

"Hurt bad?" asked Racey.

"Not too bad. I've seen worse."

"Where's he hurt?"

Rack Slimson merely corroborated what Marie had said. So far he seemed to be telling the truth. And it was natural that there should be spite in his eyes. He had no cause to feel affection for either man. But there was the something else besides the spite in those eyes. That was what interested Racey.

"You come here special to tell me this?" said Racey, staring.

"Not me," denied Rack Slimson. "I was just passin' by an' I thought I'd let yuh know."

"Just bein' neighborly, huh?"

"I dunno as I'd go so far as to say that."

"Well, I'm obliged to yuh, Slimson. I'm shore a heap obliged to yuh. Is Swing Tunstall bein' taken care of all right?"

"He's in Mike Flynn's house. Joe Blythe is a-nursin' him."

"Then I ain't needed in Farewell right now." Racey's tone was casual.

Rack Slimson rose to the bait immediately.

"He's askin' for yuh alla time," said he.

"He is, is he? Why didn't you say so at first?"

"I didn't know it was necessary."

"Which is true more ways than one. Lookit here, Slimson, where might you happen to be goin' when you run into me so providential here at Moccasin Spring?"

"I might be goin' most anywhere," Rack Slimson replied with a flash of temper.

"No call to get het, Rack, no call to get het. What I'm askin' is a fair question. Where might you be goin' today?"

"Marysville."

"Ain't you off the trail some?"

"Shore I am, some. I remembered somethin' I gotta see about at the 88 before I go to Marysville. That's how I'm goin' west instead of south."

"When did yuh first remember this here somethin' of yores?"

"When I stopped at the Bar S for a drink of water."

"An' after you'd just happened to remember this somethin', I s'pose you just happened to ask where I was an' they told yuh Moccasin Spring. Is that the how of it?"

"Yo're a good guesser," replied Rack Slimson with sarcasm.

"Sometimes I do make a center shot," Racey admitted modestly.

It was then that Marie, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, rode forth from the cottonwood grove. At sight of her Rack Slimson's eyes opened wide, then they narrowed.

"——," he muttered, turning a slightly worried look on Racey.

"What you hellin' about?" Racey inquired pleasantly.

"You knowed about Swing Tunstall alla time," complained Rack Slimson.

"What makes you think so?" Racey sidled his horse closer to Rack.

"She told yuh." Thus Rack, bluntly.

"She? What she you mean?"

"Aw, her." Rack Slimson jerked his head toward the approaching girl.

"He's got 'em again," said Racey to Mr. Saltoun and Tom Loudon. "I don't see no 'her' nowheres. Do you?"

"Not me," chorused both men.

"You see how yo're mistaken, Rack," pointed out Racey. "Yore eyes are deceivin' you. Don't you trust 'em. You don't see no girls round here, exceptin' maybe Miss Dale over at the house. You

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might 'a' seen her accordin' to whether she come to the kitchen door or not. But you ain't seen no other girl here. An' you better be shore you ain't."

"Why had I?" blustered Rack Slimson, without, however, making any hostile motion with his hands.

"Because I say so."

"What the ——'s it to yuh?"

"All you gotta do is say in Farewell that you seen Marie here at Dale's an' you'll find out. I'll even go farther than that. I'm tellin' you, Rack, that if anybody finds out in Farewell that Marie was here, or if any accident happens to her—any accident, y' understand—I'll have to take it as evidence that you had to blat. Fair enough, huh?"

"But s'posin' somebody else sees her an' tells about it?" protested Rack Slimson.

"In that case yo're out of luck," was the unfeeling reply.

"But—" began again Rack Slimson.

"You might try prayer," Racey interrupted. "It would maybe help. You can't tell."

The unhappy Rack Slimson looked toward Mr. Saltoun and Tom Loudon. But there was no aid for him in that quarter. In fact, both men eyed him with frank hostility.

"So you see Marie is kept out of it." Racey laid this final injunction on Rack as the girl in question joined them. "You don't guess this girl is her, do yuh?"

"Nun-no," declared Rack hastily. "I don't. She's somebody else for all I care."

"That's the way to talk," Racey said, nodding approvingly. "You keep right on holdin' to them sentiments an' I wouldn't be surprized if you lived quite a long while."

Marie showed her teeth in a laugh.

"I ain't a-scared of no such breed of chunker as Rack Slimson," said she calmly. "I can manage him my own self. You goin' back to Farewell, Racey?"

"Right now."

"Then I'll be goin' with you."

"You'll do no such a thing. There's no sense in yore runnin' into trouble thataway. You'll come in to Farewell after me an' from another direction."

"Shore, I was goin' to. I was only gonna ride along with yuh part way."

Racey shook his head.

"Wouldn't be sensible, that wouldn't. Somebody might see yuh. You come along later like I told yuh. Me an' Rack will travel together."

"I was goin' to the 88," protested Rack.

"Yo're mistaken," Racey told him firmly. "Yo're goin' to Farewell—with me. Ain't yuh?"

"I s'pose so," Rack Slimson capitulated.

"Then c'mon. Get a-goin'."

Marie watched the two men ride away together.

"Ain't he the hellion?" she said admiringly to Tom and Old Salt. "Bound to have his own way if it kills him."

At this there was a slight sound from the direction of the garden. Marie and the two men turned to look. Trowel in hand, Molly Dale was kneeling on one knee between two rows of flowers. But she was not doing any weeding. She was staring fixedly at Marie. While a man could breathe twice Molly stared at Marie, then she dropped her head and became very busy with the trowel.

Marie's sniff was audible at thirty feet. She picked up her reins and nodded to Tom Loudon and Mr. Saltoun.

"See yuh later," said she, and started her horse in the direction of Farewell. But she whirled him back before he had taken three steps.

"I clean forgot he was yore hoss," she said apologetically to Mr. Saltoun. "I'll have to go back to the Bar S first."

"Thassall right," Mr. Saltoun made haste to assure her. "You take him right along. One of the boys can ride yore hoss to town on the next trip, an' ride this one back."

"That will save me a lot of trouble," said Marie, turning her bewildered mount a second time.

"She ain't ridin' straight toward Farewell," said Tom Loudon, rolling a slow cigaret.

"Aw, she's sensible," yawned Mr. Saltoun. "She'll do like Racey says all right. She must like him a lot. I— What's a matter with *you?*"

For Tom Loudon had contrived to make a long leg and give Mr. Saltoun a vigorous kick on the ankle.

"I guess we'll be goin'," dodged Tom Loudon, and then took off his hat to Miss Dale. "So long, miss. If you—uh— You know where the Bar S is in case—just in case, y' understand."

He touched his horse with the spur and moved off with as much dignity as a colonel of cavalry. Not so Mr. Saltoun. He had

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been kicked, and the kick hurt, and he was very red and ruffled in consequence. Swearing under his breath, he followed his son-in-law.

"Here," he demanded, crowding his horse alongside, "what did yuh kick me for?"

Tom Loudon looked over his shoulder before replying. The ranch-house was a hundred yards in the rear and Molly Dale was not in sight. He deliberately turned his head and looked his father-in-law straight in the eye.

"What did I kick yuh for?" he repeated. "I kicked you 'cause you didn't have no sense."

This was too much. "Huh? 'Cause I—Lookit here, you——"

"'T'sall right, 't'sall right. You didn't have no sense. Here's Molly Dale thinks Racey is the only fellah ever rode a cayuse, an' you have to blat out so she can hear yuh, 'Marie must shore like him a lot.'"

"Well, what of it? I don't see——"

"You don't. Wait till I tell Kate."

"It ain't necessary to tell my daughter nothin'," Mr. Saltoun remonstrated hurriedly. "I s'pose my sayin' that about Marie might give Molly a wrong idea maybe about Racey. But how do you know she likes Racey? You been talkin' to her? Did she tell yuh so?"

"I ain't an' she didn't. I been talkin' to Kate. She told me. Don't ask me how she knows. She says she knows, an' that's enough for me. You can't fool a woman in things like that."

"You can't fool 'em in anythin'," corroborated Mr. Saltoun bitterly. "I shore oughtn't said that about Racey an' Marie. I'll go right back now an' tell Molly it ain't so."

Mr. Saltoun started to wheel his horse, but Tom Loudon halted that maneuver.

"You gotta let it go now," said he. "If you tell her you didn't mean what you said she shore *will* think it's true."

"We-ell, if you think I'd better not, I won't," Mr. Saltoun assented doubtfully. "But I wouldn't say nothin' to Kate if I was you."

"Then I won't," said Tom Loudon, his tongue in his cheek.

"Where you think yo're goin'?" Mr. Saltoun queried presently. "This ain't the way to the ranch."

"I know it ain't. It's the way to Farewell."

"Why-for Farewell?"

"It's just possible Racey may need a li'l help before he's through with this job."

"Yo're right," Mr. Saltoun said contritely. "I've been so took up with this Dale mortgage an' the idea of Luke Tweezy an' that skunk Lanpher gettin' this land that I ain't give much thought to anythin' else. Of course Racey will need help, an' you an' I are the fellers to give it to him."

TO BE CONCLUDED

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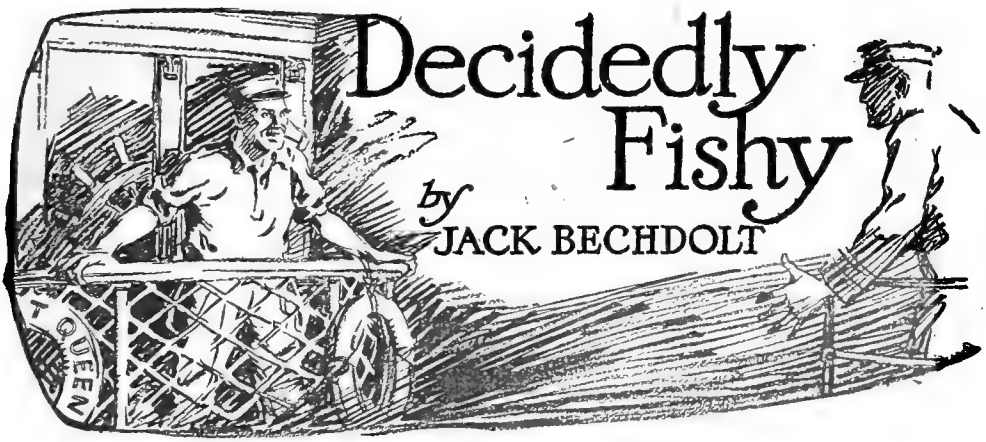

Decidedly Fishy

by JACK BECHDOLT

Author of "Honest Men," "Dead Reckoning," etc.

THE City of Samish was at the head of Rainier Inlet, a narrow-mouthed arm of Puget Sound; and the principal industrial feature of its little water-front, aside from the brand-new municipal dock, was the plant of the Acme Salmon Cannery. The people of Samish were proud of the Acme plant and the Acme Company was glad to maintain it along the city water-front, but out of deference to the neighbors it established another and quite remunerative branch of the canning business outside of Rainier Inlet, three miles from the city, so far off that even the most sensitive nose could not complain. That branch was the fertilizer plant.

Once every other day a battered, tubby and almost paintless steamboat whose stern wheel and overgrown paddle-box dwarfed its short length, called at the Acme cannery and hitched a line to several scow-loads of fish refuse—the heads and tails of Sockeyes and Humpies whose more aristocratic parts had gone into tin cans. With this tow the humble steamboat, which bore the pretentious name of *Puget Queen*, proceeded down the inlet, out of the narrow mouth and alongshore to the Acme by-products plant.

And if by any chance the *Puget Queen* passed a vessel on her way persons who happened to be on deck departed hurriedly within doors while grinning deck-hands ostentatiously seized their noses between thumb and forefinger and profane captains jockeyed their wheels to get to leeward of the fragrance of departed fish.

When scenes like this occurred the door of the *Queen's* square box of a pilot-house would burst open and a wrathful figure, known the length and breadth of the sound as the figure of Captain "Fog-Horn" Hood, the *Queen's* master, would shake a fist in pantomimic rage at the insults to his vessel. Sometimes a fellow mariner would raise a laugh by holding his nose when Captain Fog-Horn Hood passed down the sidewalk; but he was always careful not to let the old man see the joke in performance. "Fish" was a word that his cronies avoided mentioning during the life of that hauling contract.

"You went and made the *Queen* the laughin'-stock of all Puget Sound, takin' that haulin' job," Fog-Horn complained to Dan Halsey, the *Queen's* owner. "You've ruined the reputation of a good steamboat. Who's goin' to travel on a stinkin' fish-scow!

"Yes; and by —— every hand aboard's got to think the smell sticks to his clothes. Olson says when he goes ashore the dogs follow him in packs, thinkin' he's a walkin' chowder dinner. Danny, them fish is naturally breakin' my heart."

"Can't help that," Dan Halsey answered. "The contract pays us money, and we need all the business we can get. Till our new boat comes off the ways we'll keep on making all we can because we need it, Fog-Horn; lots of money. New boats cost nowadays. Anyway it's only a few months more——"

"Yes, and in a few months you can't tell me from a dead salmon. Why, Danny, you know what they call us? They call us the Fertilizer Line, that's what."

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"Fog-Horn, if hauling fish refuse brings us money we'll haul it a little while longer till the new boat's out. Then——"

"Then! Yes; then I'll have got me a good job in a glue-works," Fog-Horn declared profanely.

But he didn't mean it, and they both knew he didn't mean it. Fog-Horn Hood and Dan Halsey would stand by each other as long as there was salt water in Puget Sound.

MAYOR LEN ROOT of the city of Samish was engaged in the very doubtful experiment of combining oil and water into a harmonious mixture that would pacify the most hotly contested question ever before the municipal fathers of a fast-growing Puget Sound city. It is a well-known fact that you can quiet troubled waters by an application of oil, but a fish-fertilizer plant would smell like attar of roses before Mayor Root could merge the human oil and salt-water elements of his experiment into any state where one or the other did not come out on top. Nevertheless he deserves credit for trying.

Oil was chiefly represented in the person of Richmond P. Bown, head of the Tilikum Lines, popularly known as the Sound steamboat trust. Bown, with powerful financial backing, controlled all the passenger and freight hauling considered worth while. He owned a fleet of handsome, flashy ships and a safe full of remunerative business contracts.

Bown was an oleaginous person, large of girth, soft-looking and soft-spoken. His throaty, purring voice was a rich, golden lubricant to any discussion, and usually he had only to speak to get his way.

Bown was accompanied by young Captain Ford, master of the *Councilor*, flagship of the Tilikum fleet, and by the distinguished jurist Judge Hobart Markman of Markman, Markman & Hines of Seattle. The trio made up the oil of Mayor Root's experiment.

The salt water was two men, Captain Dan Halsey and Captain Fog-Horn Hood. Dan Halsey was brown, lean and gray-eyed, born with the ambition to carry on the steamboat business which his father had founded and which Bown had practically ruined.

Dan Halsey's companion was a slouchy, weather-beaten person well past his sixtieth birthday, clad in a slouchy, weather-beaten blue uniform and balancing on his knee a mangy cap that bore the faded gilt legend CAPTAIN. He kept a corn-cob pipe thrust between his teeth and poisoned the air of the mayor's office with the fumes of Yellow Dog mixture. His shock of white hair stood at sixes and sevens and his scrubby, shoe-brush mustache bristled angrily. While Richmond P. Bown talked Fog-Horn Hood barely restrained the expression of his violent hatred of an old enemy to inarticulate grumblings in his throat.

Young Dan Halsey had good reason to hate Bown, who had taken away his father's business by sharp methods; but Fog-Horn had far better reason, for Richmond P. Bown once accomplished the old mariner's complete disgrace. Only by the stanch friendship of the younger Halsey was Fog-Horn Hood saved from a derelict state after he had done Bown's bidding and wrecked the steamer *Star*.

Mayor Root's oil and water was very far from mixing; and it was plain that no amount of talk could perform the miracle.

The mayor had to concede the fact. He said rather sadly:

"Well, gentlemen, I've done my best to get you together purely in the interests of the people of Samish, but it looks as if I was wasting my time. The fact is, the people of this town voted the bonds and built the new municipal dock for their own benefit. I fail to see how leasing that dock exclusively to either one of you is going to be best for our city——"

Bown interrupted smoothly.

"But—ah—pardon me, Mr. Mayor; your—ah—city council already has given the Tilikum lines an exclusive lease to the dock for fifteen years, and—ah——"

"I don't approve that lease," said Mayor Root. "It doesn't serve public interest——"

"But—ah—surely, Mr. Mayor, the Tilikum lines will give Samish a passenger and freight service second to none! Our splendid liner *Councilor* is to make regular stops on her Seattle run; our whole fleet is—er—practically at your disposal. No other company has the modern equipment——"

Dan Halsey cut in, his voice hard and even his gray eyes menacingly cold.

"Mr. Bown understands very well that I am building a modern steamer to be

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delivered in a few months, and I guarantee to give Samish as fine service as any company in existence——"

"Yes, and a hull sight finer," Fog-Horn seconded in a voice that shook the windows. "For, the matter o' that, what's wrong with the *Queen?* Mebbe she ain't so pretty as some of these fancy new boats, but there's a boat that's been deliverin' passengers and freight on time before certain parties knew fore from aft; and she ain't good enough for any town——"

Bown smiled as he answered this defiance, a smile of amused contempt—the contempt of a king for a pauper, of a film star for the humblest four-dollar-a-day "extra," of the imported limousine for the rusty tin Lizzie. He addressed his remark to Mayor Root, quite ignoring the gentlemen who opposed him.

"And—ah—I was about to add, Mr. Mayor, that despite certain rumors and promises, regrettably vague, concerning a new boat on this run, we already have the fleet, and would consider it an insult to ask the good people of Samish to ride on a fish-scow——"

"Stow that talk, you salmon-eating, fly-blown——"

Fog-Horn lunged forward from his chair as he bellowed, but the lunge and the bellow both were cut in two by Dan Halsey's quick arms. The old man subsided, struggling and grumbling.

"—on a fish-scow," Bown repeated placidly; "for such, I—ah—regret to say, appears to be the only apparent opposition we have to deal with, Mr. Mayor. Surely you would not expect your people to patronize an antiquated, rattle-trap old tub fragrant with the odor of salmon refuse? In fact, if you'll—ah—pardon the remark, I find that even in this room the odor of—ah—fish has become——"

In spite of Dan Halsey Fog-Horn was out of his chair and charging the speaker, dragging his employer behind him. Bown stepped back quickly, turning a sickly white. It was Mayor Root who stayed the tide of battle, interposing his own person in Fog-Horn's path.

"Let me at him, Len Root," the old man panted. "Danny, you loose your hands off'n me; you hear? Give me room, both of you or by——"

"You sit down," the mayor ordered, "or I'll send for the marshal——"

"He's insulted my boat, I tell you! You leave me loose——"

"Down," seconded Halsey.

Between them the two men forced Fog-Horn back to his chair.

"Now," the mayor announced, while Halsey held down his belligerent friend, "there's just one thing to do. I told you I don't approve the council's making an exclusive lease of this dock to Mr. Bown's company, and I'll veto the bill. If the council wants to pass it 'spite my disapproval, that's their business. Gentlemen, this conference is adjourned."

Richmond P. Bown, Judge Hobart Markman and Captain Ford of the *Councilor* left together and hurriedly. Halsey kept his firm hold of Fog-Horn until they were well gone. Then he talked confidentially with the mayor while the old man moved moodily to the window.

Glancing down to the street, Fog-Horn saw the trio of enemies taking their departure; and at that moment young Ford glanced back and saw him. Ford performed a brief little pantomime that unmistakably registered the sensations of a man assaulted by the unpleasant odor of dead fish.

Fog-Horn Hood was half out of the window after his tormentor and going fast when the mayor and Halsey hauled him back.

There were tears in Fog-Horn's eyes when he ceased his struggles. The old skipper was quivering like a frightened horse.

"No man every lived to do that before," he complained bitterly. "Insulted the old *Queen.* Why, by ——, gentlemen, that's just as bad as an insult to Mary Hood. Just the same, every bit of it. I'd ought to have torn him in two, the fat toad——"

"You old reprobate!" Halsey cried sternly. "This isn't a barroom, and if you can't learn manners——"

"Why, Danny, you heard Bown! You heard him yourself! Smirched up the old *Queen* with his filthy talk—made us a laughin'-stock——"

"It's you will make us a laughing-stock, flying into a rage like a child. Now you listen, Fog-Horn—" Halsey had an arm about the old man's shoulder as he reasoned—"there's no disgrace hauling fish refuse. That's honest business——"

"Makin' my boat a —— garbage-scow!"

"Better than working for Bown, isn't it? Well! And we've got to have every

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ent we can get, the way we do business on a shoestring. And, Fog-Horn, if we don't get a berth at this new dock we'd better take our new boat out and sink her. That's what. We've got to have this Samish business or go broke——"

"Well, suffering torment, we got that, ain't we? Thanks to Len Root's bein' on the square——"

"No, we haven't got it," Halsey answered soberly.

Len Root agreed with a quick shake of the head.

"Bown's got the council sewed up in a sack," Root explained. "They'll put through the lease over my veto sure as fish swim——"

"Unless we can turn public sentiment," Halsey joined in. "And we won't get any support if we go picking fights and brawling around. So, Fog-Horn, you've got to stand by like you've always stood by the Halseys. You've got to stand by this time by going right on about your business towing fish to the fertilizer plant and keeping out of fights, and looking the other way when Bown's pups try to torment you about it.

"This is dead serious business, Fog-Horn. I've got just a Chinaman's chance to win out and you've got to help all you can. I always knew where I could find you before, Fog-Horn Hood. Will you stick this time?"

No mistaking the seriousness in Dan Halsey's words. His gray eyes searched the old man's face, demanding a promise.

Fog-Horn bowed his gray head slowly. He was fighting down his natural stubbornness and rage at those who insulted his steamboat, and it was a hard thing to do. He said slowly:

"Guess I always stood by, didn't I, Danny? Well then!"

Dan Halsey was perfectly satisfied with that promise.

FOG-HORN HOOD had three loves —his anchors against the tempests of a passionate life. First was his wife, Mary Hood, who from their little home on Chuckanut Bay ruled his affections without dispute. Toward her the old man always displayed an old-fashioned chivalric devotion that contrasted oddly with his other uncouth ways.

Second came the Halsey family. All his life, except for one brief, unhappy period, he had worked for the honor and profit of the Halseys.

Last, and usually foremost in his thoughts because it was mostly in his daily life, was that barnacle-bitten, paintless, stub-nosed and asthmatic relic of the days of steamboat woodyards, the stern-wheeler *Puget Queen*. Queen she was, flashing belle of Puget Sound's scant commerce, when Fog-Horn Hood took her, his first command as a captain. She had glistened in new white paint, and the crown surmounting her square pilot-house was of gold leaf with cunningly painted jewels of blue and red. There was a red ingrain carpet with huge flower figures in her cabin then; and than that nothing finer could be found afloat.

So constant had been Fog-Horn's association with the *Queen*, so gradual the changes Time brings, that often he forgot there had been changes, just as many men forget to grow old. To him the *Queen* was still a queen; and swifter, finer vessels were new-fangled contraptions, bound to come to grief sooner or later. What criticism he had to make of his command he reserved for the sanctity of his own circle. In public he admitted no rival.

By wit and ingenuity and an aptitude for navigating the Sound so remarkable it was like a sixth sense, the loyal old man kept the old boat afloat and in service, and time and again saved the faltering fortunes of Dan Halsey from what looked like inevitable disaster.

But this present service asked of him was hardest of all. To keep his tongue between his teeth, to ignore insults to his *Queen*, worst of all to keep on towing dead fish to a fertilizer plant—the labors of Hercules were as child's play to the labors of Fog-Horn Hood!

Faithfully on every alternate day the *Queen* called at Samish and Fog-Horn hitched on to several scow-loads of odoriferous odds and ends of deceased fish and escorted them gravely to the fertilizer and by-products works outside the harbor, while passing vessels sheered away and facetious deck-hands jeered as they held their noses.

And faithfully he kept his word to Dan Halsey, ignoring half-concealed smiles and half-heard comments about his fish-scow, keeping the peace—though Heaven only knows what agony it cost him.

"Fish!" shouted Fog-Horn, pacing his

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pilot-house and wrinkling his nose in disgust. "Scents of Araby, ain't there nothin' left in the world but fish? Hull —— boat stinks of fish. I breathe fish, taste fish, sleep with fish; and by Judas cook tried to make me eat one this mornin'!

"Why, there ain't the man livin' can make me eat another salmon, not while I got my strength. Salmon; that grub for a Siwash—ain't et one since I was a boy. Had to then because the old man was poor and fish was cheap. Had fish for breakfast, fish for dinner and fish for supper. Chowder on Sundays. Hull family of us like walkin' salmon-traps. D'you wonder I hate 'em?

"Why, take a salmon, what sense has he got? Can't learn him nothin' or the packers would of gone bust years ago. Just got brains enough to go lay a million eggs and raise a million more salmon. Then he goes and dies and poisons the air with his remainders.

"Fish? If the world was my tin can I'd seal up all the salmon in it and heave it out somewheres beyond the end of the Milky Way where I couldn't smell another fish till Judgment Day! Oh, Lord, Danny, how long—how long?"

"Mighty little longer," said Dan Halsey, witness to his outburst. "In fact just two days more. Then either we get this dock privilege and do business with our new boat or you can go back to Mary Hood and the ranch and never smell another fish the rest of your life."

Dan Halsey looked mighty serious. He said again:

"We either make or break, Fog-Horn; that's the size of it this time—make or break. Samish is the one place we've got a look-in for a passenger and freight business enough to make the new boat pay. And if Bown hogs the new dock we'd be better off clerking in some store. Well, tomorrow night settles it——"

"Council meets then?"

"Last chance they've got to pass the lease bill over Root's veto."

"And—and, Danny—they——"

Halsey shook his head quickly.

"I don't know. There's nine in all counting Len Root, and he can't vote. Three are openly for us. Two others doubtful.

"I've argued and I've tried. I've used all the influence I've got and all the sense God gave me. But I don't know. Bown's got them hypnotized. Likely he's spent some money with 'em too, or promised them business or favors——"

"Yes," Fog-Horn growled; "that would be Bown's way—crooked and dirty!"

"Well, I've done my best. If they take up the bill it'll be only to pass it. If only they leave it alone and let the veto become law— I tell you, Fog-Horn, you can't tell what that crowd will do; and it means life or death to us!"

Halsey slouched wearily against the cushioned locker at the rear of the pilot-house. Fog-Horn stood watching him, his manner uneasy. He wanted to say something that would hearten his friend, but it was hard to find what to say.

Fog-Horn was still scratching his head when the pilot-house door admitted Mayor Len Root.

The mayor was red-faced from hurry. He puffed.

"Heard the news, Halsey?"

Halsey shook his head, and Mayor Root went on:

"Bown's invited the whole city council on an excursion—start this evening—his guests on the *Councilor*. Lot of fine grub and cigars—and likely some drinks too. Going to make a trip up Hood Canal and come back tomorrow evening in time for the meeting. Say, can you beat that for nerve!"

Dan Halsey asked huskily—

"It's the dock lease, of course?"

"What else would it be!"

"They all going?"

"All but two. Stevens and Smith don't sell their votes that cheap. But the rest of 'em—stampeded like a pack of kids. It looks like your finish, Dan. They'll go with Bown and eat his grub and smoke his smokes and get all filled up with his big talk and soft-soaping ways and come home tomorrow night ready to jam through his lease if it was vetoed by the President of the United States. I'm sorry; I sure am sorry, Dan——"

Dan Halsey said nothing. He sighed and slouched even more wearily against the cushioned locker, his eyes on the floor.

"Bown!" groaned Fog-Horn Hood. "That Bown! Fat, soft-spoken, slimy—ready to betray his own mother if there was profit in it. And he talks to me about fish! Why, alongside him a dead salmon's a gentleman."

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THE next day was fish-day for Fog-Horn Hood. The master of the *Queen* was having a last word with her owner preparatory to running over to the Acme plant for his ill-smelling scow-loads.

"No word from Bown, Danny?"

"None. The *Councilor* will come in probably just in time to hold that meeting and vote the lease. They've got until midnight, and you won't catch Bown taking any chances. He'll keep his votes herded up to the last minute. Oh, he's got us licked all right."

Halsey turned to stare moodily from the pilot-house window, ashamed to let Hood see the black disappointment in his face.

Fog-Horn cleared his throat uneasily and touched the younger man on the arm.

"Dan, I thought of something——"

"What?" Halsey's voice showed no interest.

"Well now, if we do lose——"

"*If* we do! Why, it's all over."

"Well, when we do, then—why, Danny, there's the fish business left for the old *Queen*. Pretty good money hauling for the fertilizer works, Dan. And the new boat, when she's launched—why if they ain't any business, maybe you could charter her out for a time.

"As for me, I'll keep on hauling fish. I don't mind. Fact is, I got so's I kind of enjoy it, you might say——"

Halsey turned on him, and there was a grin struggling through his gloom. When he spoke his voice had a queer pitch that told of amusement and affection and friendly scorn and something like applause.

"You old liar," said Dan Halsey. "You old liar! You like fish——"

"Sure I do. I like this run."

Halsey laughed briefly.

"Forget it, Fog-Horn. We're through with dead fish anyhow. I'll send the *Queen* to a boneyard first. Now you'd better go get your last tow, and when you've delivered that run down to Seattle and report to me. I'll stick here, though —— knows why. Just to see the corpse decently buried, I guess."

When the *Queen* left the Acme cannery, towing three scow-loads of fish refuse, the water of Rainier Inlet was silky but troubled by a slow ground-swell, the echo of a heavier ground-swell from outside. There had been a brisk gale on the previous night, but this day was placid, with no air stirring and an August sun struggling through thick, baking-hot vapors. What the *Queen* bore away from the cannery sent out a heavy, poisonous odor that was unforgettable.

Mr. Olson, the *Queen's* first mate, was at the wheel, guiding the old stern-wheeler round the bend of the inlet and out of sight of Samish. Fog-Horn paced the deck, close to the open windows. His thoughts dwelt with Richmond P. Bown and Bown's crooked ways.

"Out on them scows 'longside the other dead fish, that's where he belongs," the old man grumbled. "If he was to set foot on my deck I'd put him there too. Yes, Bown, I'd like to see you right here."

His fists doubled.

"I'd like five minutes with you, Bown! You wouldn't say 'fish' to me again, I'll bet you that. And I'll bet you'd never get ashore in time to get that dock away from Danny Halsey either. ——, why can't we meet the *Councilor* now? I'd give Bown some fish to think about——"

Here Fog-Horn Hood stopped talking and stopped pacing. He stood as one struck by lightning, and slowly a grin uprooted his shoe-brush mustache and radiated up and down his lined and mahogany-hued face.

He gave one excited hitch to his uniform trousers, which since his suspenders invariably dangled in loops about his hips when he was afloat, were on the point of completely deserting their post of duty. Then he wheeled on Olson with an astonishing question.

"Like fish, Olson? Like to smell 'em, eh?"

"By Yosef, not dem dead ones," Olson declared.

" 'Course you don't. Nobody does except maybe a Siwash. Well, Olson, you don't have to smell 'em, my boy. No, sir, I ain't goin' to torture your sufferin' nose any longer, Olson, because, my boy, I'm goin' to take that wheel away from you. Mouth of the inlet's too narrow and ticklish for a young cub like you, Olson. You let the old man take the *Queen* out, and just you go hide your nose in your bunk where them fish ain't quite so promiscuous."

Good as his word, Fog-Horn took over the wheel and watched Olson go aft to his own little cabin.

And as he steered the old man grinned

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wider and wider. The profanity of Fog-Horn Hood was notorious in the history of profanity and had the power to shock even old shell-back deck-hands whose memory recalled all the past masters of cussing; but more shocking and pregnant of trouble to come for somebody than even Fog-Horn's profanity was such a grin as he grinned to himself in the pilot-house.

THERE was a string band on the *Councilor*, made up of cabin and dining-room boys who could play mandolin and guitar. It always played in the evenings for dances, taking its reward in tips; and since it cost the company nothing and pleased the passengers, Bown approved it.

As the handsome Tilikum liner rumbled steadily on toward Samish, breasting the long, smooth swells, the band played gaily on the broad promenade deck. The guests of Richmond P. Bown lounged comfortably in deck-chairs, hilariously applauding the *Councilor's* comedian purser Fat McFadden and the Samish council clerk, a fat young man named Ellis, who were doing a burlesque shimmy dance. An orange moon that looked big as a county-fair race-track had just risen and a white-coated steward was passing a tray of glasses from Bown's private cellar. It was altogether one of those moments when hilarity knows no bounds and mirth and happiness reign supreme.

Bown's excursion had been a great success.

The six councilmen and the fat council clerk had the run of the boat. It was like their own private yacht. Food, cigars and drinks were thrust upon them at all hours.

Purser McFadden was a born entertainer; Bown an urbane, smiling host whose only law was his guest's wishes; and, to add just the right touch of serious persuasion, Judge Markman had been invited. Before the *Councilor* turned her nose toward Samish not a councilman but believed he was doing Samish a public service by leasing the dock to the Tilikum lines for fifteen years and consigning Dan Halsey, Fog-Horn Hood and the battered old *Puget Queen* to eternal oblivion.

As Dan Halsey surmised, Bown was taking no chances with the votes he had won. He planned to get the councilmen home at just nine o'clock, in time to call a special meeting that would override Mayor Root's veto of the leasing bill and leave the members anxious to get to their homes. Bown was taking no chances on failure, and his plans were working out with the precision and smoothness of well-oiled machinery.

The six councilmen were beating time hilariously with their hands, encouraging the dancers with shouts of "Atta boy! Shake 'em up, Fat! Give us the jellyfish quiver, old boy!" Captain Ford, who had left the wheel to his first officer, laughed with an earnest hilarity that proved his anxiety to please. Judge Markman had relaxed his ambassadorial dignity in a frosty smile and Bown was heard remarking, "Steward, bring a fresh box of those perfectos and another round of drinks."

Then the dancers stopped as if petrified. The string band missed one complete bar of "Dardanella." Smiles were wiped from every councilmanic face. A hush that quivered with shocked surprize smote the entire company; for, as abruptly as if she had run full on a reef, the *Councilor* collided with the smell of dead fish, a smell spread out like a belt of fog, an odor solid as granite and yet endowed with a boiling, seething penetration like some deadly acid.

In that minute every soul aboard the *Councilor* ceased whatever he was doing and gasped—and instantly regretted the gasp.

Before a guest had spoken, before even Richmond P. Bown could recover his poise, before even one cabin-boy could tinkle a tentative note on guitar or mandolin there followed a second surprize. The engine-room signal sounded a muffled clang, then two quick clangs more. The engines stopped dead and began again hurriedly, reversing the screw. The *Councilor* trembled like a stricken racer and came at last to a dead stop with the hissing water astern the only sound to break the silence.

A long, majestic roller, oily-smooth, lifted the vessel up and up and still higher, then swung her down with a cradling, cuddling affection that sent the stricken dancers staggering and even tipped up deck-chairs.

At the first gong Captain Ford was off forward like a racer. Before the vessel had climbed a dozen waves he was back again with the news.

"It's that old rascal Fog-Horn Hood—Fog-Horn Hood and his miserable tow of

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fish-scows. He's aground hard and fast, right across the mouth of the inlet."

Bown was a man of quick decisions. When he said a thing a large and competent organization of men and money saw to it that the thing was so. His "Yes" and "No" or "Go" and "Come" were law—like the Constitution of the United States. Now Bown said instantly in reply to Captain Ford:

"He can't block the inlet. You tell him so."

Ford said, "Yes, Mr. Bown," but lingered uncertainly.

Ford had seen with his own eyes that the *Puget Queen* and three scows in a tow, hopelessly tangled, were stranded square across the only channel into Samish harbor. They were stranded and the tide was ebbing, leaving them dryer every minute.

"You tell him," said Bown, "that the city council of Samish is on this boat—that they are *my* guests—and they must get back to Samish at once. At once! Tell him I said so——"

"Yes, Mr. Bown."

"And, Ford——"

"Yes, sir."

"If he refuses to get out of our way——"

"Yes, sir?"

"Why—ah—Ford, make him get out. Understand? Make him!"

Ford said once more, "Yes, Mr. Bown," and departed shaking his head. He was perfectly sure of one thing; and that was, for whatever trouble followed Bown would hold him responsible. Sometimes Ford had reason to wish he had never been born.

Bown then said in his best manner—

"McFadden!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Make those boys play something lively."

The string band began the "Oceana Roll." As if it were a challenge Puget Sound sent an extra-enthusiastic swell to cradle the *Councilor*, and young Ellis, who was standing with a strange, preoccupied stare, sat down suddenly.

"Steward," Bown commanded, "pass those cigars. Can't you see the gentlemen want fresh smokes?"

From force of habit the six gentlemen helped themselves to cigars and several lighted them, but one by one they let the sparks die out.

The orchestra played on and the *Councilor* rolled steadily.

One or two tried to make conversation, but spasmodically. Two facts pushed all other thoughts into the background: The *Councilor* was rolling with a sickening, lurching roll and the heavy, warm air was choking with the awful odor of fish—dead fish.

Bown said suddenly, "This is intolerable!"

He forced a smile and a host-like briskness as he rose.

"Gentlemen, let us—ah—step to the saloon during this—ah—little delay. The steward has a little surprize for us, I believe. Some—ah—sandwiches and a lobster salad."

The guests rose obediently but without enthusiasm and staggered after him—all but one. Young Ellis had risen too, but suddenly he paused and was heard to cry out—

"Lobster salad—oh, ——!"

He was the first of the company to seek absolute privacy.

FOG-HORN HOOD in person answered young Ford's hail. The *Councilor* trained a brilliant searchlight on the stranded *Queen*, and its rays revealed the old man in his usual state of *dishabille*, suspenders dangling about his hips, red-flannel shirt open at the throat, his uniform cap hung rakishly about one ear, his white hair flying, mustache bristling and corn-cob pipe showering sparks. He seemed pathetically grateful to see Ford.

"Glad you come; mighty glad," he roared, disdaining the megaphone. "Been lyin' here whistlin' for a tug for hours, and I might's well of asked help off a weejee board for all it got me. Or maybe you had business at Samish, captain, and ain't got time to help?"

"I've got business there," Ford megaphoned back. "Important business—but how can I get in? You're blocking the channel."

"So I am. Well, by thunder, that's right!"

Fog-Horn discovered this with considerable surprize.

"Guess you got to wait for me," he apologized brazenly.

"Now look here, Captain Hood. Got the Samish city council on board. They've got to hold a meeting before midnight—an important meeting. You'll have to move out somehow."

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"How?" Fog-Horn demanded. "Don't look's if I could move, does it?"

There was no denying that. Ford scratched his head.

"Think a tow would get you loose?" he inquired anxiously.

Fog-Horn thought it might.

The *Councilor* passed a cable to the *Queen*, and the old man himself superintended its making fast. Then Bown's liner turned her nose about and pulled. The *Councilor* was a powerful craft, and she turned up her best speed. The only result was to stretch the Manila hawser like a fiddle string.

After an hour of useless tugging Ford drifted close to the *Queen* again. He hailed her master.

"Look here, Captain Hood, I can't budge you——"

"Noticed that," Fog-Horn grinned. "Thought you had more power'n that, Captain Ford."

Ford ignored this.

"But those scows are blocking you. Cut loose your tow and give me a better chance——"

"Cut loose them scows!"

"Yes; they——"

"No, sir!"

The answer was prompt.

"Why, Cap'n Ford, I'm surprized at you! Those scows are my tow. I'm responsible for that cargo to the underwriters. You think I'm going to cast my cargo adrift? You'd ought to know better!"

"But look here. The Samish council is aboard—got to get ashore—got to hold a meeting. And Mr. Bown is on my boat—Mr. Richmond P. Bown himself."

"Yes? Well, these scows was entrusted to me and they're my affair. Towing fish is my livelihood, Ford, and I'm responsible for every dead fish aboard. And I ain't goin' to cast 'em adrift. If Mr. Richmond P. Bown himself is on your boat and he's such a little tin god, why don't you get Mr. Richmond P. Bown to show us how to get out o' this mess? Hey, Ford? Won't you ask him?"

This blasphemy against the name of Bown was made doubly shocking to Ford by the discovery that the head of the Tilikum lines had appeared unexpectedly at his elbow, bracing himself against the rail to withstand the *Councilor's* wallowing. He forebore to answer Fog-Horn, waiting for the Bown lightning to strike.

But Bown did not answer the *Queen's* captain. His face was a sickly, yellowish green and shining with perspiration. He spoke hurriedly to Ford, and his words were disconnected, though of plain meaning.

"Ford—told you to get by that ruffian—How's this—not moving? Intolerable, Ford—This—ah—awful odor— You heard my orders, I think."

"But, Mr. Bown! See for yourself; what else can I do?"

"Do something," Bown mumbled hurriedly. "Last word—Ford. I shall hold you——"

Bown lurched with a sudden pitching.

He was slammed across the narrow bridge, and for a moment hung half-doubled over the opposite rail. He straightened by a desperate effort.

"I—shall hold—you——"

He began again, and again went lurching, bringing up hard against Ford and momentarily embracing him.

Ford steadied the king of Puget Sound shipping until he found his balance, waiting respectfully for his message.

"Understand," said Bown, "I told you——"

He slipped, protesting with every muscle, the length of the bridge. His feet were close to the ladder below.

Clinging Bown finished speedily—

"—personally—responsible."

Then he slithered rapidly from sight. The pitch of a vessel becalmed will try even the hardiest sailor; and add to that the sort of smell that emanated from the stranded *Queen* and even a Richmond P. Bown will sometimes succumb.

THERE was an anxious little crowd of citizens at the dock end when finally a lifeboat from the *Councilor* materialized through the gloom over the water. The city council's non-arrival to pass the dock-leasing bill over the mayor's veto had spread many rumors of an accident to the excursionists.

The passengers of the lifeboat landed slowly and without enthusiasm. Several were helped up the dock on the arms of Bown's sailors. They were white, limp and miserable. Nobody cared to answer questions, and the refugees showed an immediate tendency to separate toward their own homes.

Judge Markman grasped Bown by the arm.

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"Time yet for that meeting," he urged. "Quarter of an hour yet. Let's try to round 'em up."

With the help of the purser and Ford, Bown made one last effort. But the councilmen of Samish were unanimous now on one question only.

Should they seek their beds and bury the past in sleep's oblivion, praying a merciful God to purge them of the odor of dead fish, or should they not?

Decidedly the ayes had it!

And while Bown and his satellites argued the city-hall clock announced midnight. Mayor Len Root's veto of the leasing bill automatically became law.

"Halsey, you may get that dock lease," Bown sputtered angrily at the *Queen's* owner, "but by Heaven it'll do you no good. The only boat you had is hard and fast ashore; and not even the *Councilor*, towing for two hours, could budge her off." Bown seemed to swell with his malicious satisfaction.

"Any man fool enough to employ a notorious old rascal like Hood deserved it," he added venomously. "You brought this misfortune on yourself. Now, without a boat, you're done for good; and I say, serves you right."

Dan Halsey was not able to answer Bown. Before he could think of an answer suitable the business was taken from his hands. Bown's answer came from down the bay, the unmistakable whistle of the battered old *Puget Queen*.

Proudly, minus her fish-scows at last, the *Queen* docked; and Richmond P. Bown never heard the explanation meant for Dan Halsey's ears alone.

"Stranded due to tiller rope's breakin'" Fog-Horn reported, and added with a sly grin:

"But I won't deny, Danny, that maybe my pocket-knife had sòmethin' to do with that. Anyways there we lay, scentin' up a lovely boat-load of happy excursionists; and Ford towed for two hours and couldn't budge us. Finally he thought of puttin' 'em ashore in the lifeboat; but by that time they was so sick with the rollin'—*and* the sweet perfumes of fish—it took an hour more to persuade 'em to go. After that I got afloat, took my scows to the fertilizer works and come back."

"You mean to tell me, Fog-Horn, that Ford towed for two hours and couldn't budge you?"

"Yep."

"The *Councilor*, with her power—couldn't budge the old *Queen!*"

"Yep——"

"But it's impossible."

"No, Danny; just unusual. Most stranded vessels don't keep both anchors down. I had both my hooks in the mud all the time Ford was pullin'. Figured if the hawser didn't bust my hooks would hold out till Len Root's veto got to be a law. And by the Lord so they did——"

"But, Fog-Horn! The marvel to me is Ford didn't tear the old *Queen* clear in two! With his power——"

"——!"

Intolerant pride blazed from Fog-Horn Hood's eye.

"Him hurt the *Queen*, Danny? Why, there ain't the power made could as much as spring a plank on that sound old hull. The *Queen's* a real steamboat!"

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When Love's Labor's Lost

by W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Sparing the Family Tree," "The Wisdom of the Ouija," etc.

THIS is the land of the free and the home of the brave, the same of which makes your argument worthless. Everybody except 'Testament' Tilton was strong for the idea, and Testament, bein' a preacher, don't count."

"Well," says I, "it ain't none of my business, but I don't like it. I've got a right to an opinion, ain't I? Just because a committee of danged fools agrees on anything it don't mean that it's all right and perfectly proper, does it? And besides all that, where in —— are you going to get a lion?"

"From the circus which is to be at Granite on the last day of August, Ike. We aims to purchase one from them."

"Cost you a lot of money, Magpie, and I don't know of anybody in Piperock who is going to pay good money for a ordinary lion."

"Not ordinary lion, Ike—African."

Magpie Simpkins unhooks his spurs from the top of the table and rolls a smoke.

"The community is going to foot the bill," he explained. "We're goin' to sell chances on the lion. We sells the chances for enough to buy the lion and promote the entertainment. Five dollars per chance."

"I wouldn't pay five dollars for no lion."

"If you could win the lion, Ike? If your number wins you gets the lion free gratis and also a share of the receipts, which means two dollars per ticket."

"Is it the bull that Zeb Whittaker calls Calamity?"

"Uh-huh. Some animal, Ike."

"Some. But what is there about Labor Day which falls for a fight between a bull and a lion?"

"Just a novelty, Ike. You've got to hand it to us for handing Piperock something new and novel in entertainments. When me and Judge Steele, 'Wick' Smith, 'Buck' Masterson and 'Jay Bird' Whittaker gets together we sure surprizes ourselves with the things we can think of to do."

"You can't surprize me," says I. "I've suffered too many times from your brilliant ideas, Magpie. I don't *sabe* this Labor Day thing, but I reckon it has to be. Still it ain't going to be nothing in my existence, 'cause I won't be here. Nobody can point at me and say, 'Ask him—he was there.' "

"Say yuh won't?" Magpie looks sad-like at me and smooths his mustache.

"Said I wouldn't. Labor Day may be a hyiu holiday, Magpie, but it ain't no sufficient reason for me to be a stepping-stone for a lion and bull fight. I ain't lost no lions and as far as the bull is concerned—there's a great plenty always. I sure am all packed up and ready for shipment the day before."

"I'm sorry for yuh, Ike."

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"Go ahead and be sorry. I hope you enjoy the fight. I hope it is a howling success, but somebody will have to write and tell me about it, that's a cinch. Curse me if you will, but——"

"Curse yuh, Ike?"

Magpie's voice shows about two quarts of tears.

"Curse yuh, friend Harper? No, old pardner, I won't curse yuh, but——"

"No!" I yelps at the top of my voice. "—— you, let up on that sob stuff! You dog-goned——"

"Me and you has been selected to secure the lion," says he soft-like. "I promised 'em, Ike, and Magpie Simpkins never breaks his promise. I told 'em that you would go with me and I ain't goin' to let you make me out a liar. What did you say, Ike?"

"I didn't say. I was just wonderin' how we were going to haul the lion down here, Magpie."

"That's easy. We'll get a wagon, I reckon. Jay Bird is going to advance the money."

"Why not pull off the raffle first?"

"Not until after the fight, Ike. It's the uncertainty that is going to make it interesting. *Sabe?*"

"Uh-huh. Like shaking dice to see whether you're going to get shot or hung. I don't know what in —— anybody would want of a lion if they got it for five dollars."

"Yuh can't get African lions every day in the week, Ike."

"Be a —— of a place to live if you could, but that don't answer my questions, Magpie."

"Well, for gosh sake don't start any agitation like that! Let the winner decide what he wants to do with it."

"In other words—keep your danged mouth shut and let the lucky man get scratched."

"Something to that effect," says Magpie.

Old Testament Tilton sure is anti-bull-fight. He rises with indignation and scorches us with his wrath. He calls a meeting to protest against it. "Dirty Shirt" Jones was the only one in the audience and he slept all through the protest.

Testament comes to us and promises that we'll never climb the golden stairs nor twang a harp. He points out the error of our ways and denounces our past, present and future.

"Desecratin' Labor Day by chargin' two dollars to see a lion and a bull fight each other," says he, wailing-like.

"I've got a free seat for the clergymen," says Magpie. "A seat where you can see every move of the fight."

Testament seems to consider this for a while and then—

"Do you think they will put up a good fight, Magpie?"

"You can't lose nothin' by taking a chance."

"That's right, Magpie. Verily, I reckon I'll have to bow down to the popular clamor. Didn't think I'd go, but when you're in Rome you've got to do as the Romans does, I reckon."

"Yes," says I. "And when you're in Piperock, do as the rest of the —— fools do."

"Piperock ain't so bad," says Testament. "She needs better society, that's all, Ike."

"Yes," says I, "that's all —— needs."

CALAMITY was one of them cross-grained animals born with a grudge against everything on earth. He's sort of a blue-black color and inside his hide is the spirit of a grizzly and the ambition of a quart of nitroglycerin. Nobody knows why Zeb Whittaker keeps such an animal.

Calamity is a son of the cow that jumped over the moon and what he can't jump he goes through. Zeb has one puncher who don't have nothing to do but pack a hammer and some nails and foller Calamity's blazed trail.

"Weinie" Lopp tried to ride him once—just once. Weinie pulled leather for a mile, after which the cinch busted. Then Weinie played matador until he found a tree. About ten hours later we found the bull still waiting for him.

"Yuma" Yates bulldogged Calamity once. Somehow the bull got his horn tangled in Yuma's raiment and started for Canada with him. "Slim" Hawkins roped Yuma, yanked him loose, and then had to drag him half a mile to keep Calamity from hooking him. Everybody except Yuma applauded Slim for his presence of mind.

Then cometh the question of where this heroic contest is to be held. It's a cinch it can't be done in a house.

"She's got to be bull-strong and lion-proof," says Buck.

"I've got a idea," says Wick, "and she's a good idea. We'll set posts from the

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corner of my store to the corner of Buck's place, and another bunch from Rickey's corner to Pete's blacksmith shop. We'll set in high posts and board 'em to the top. We can fix seats on top of the store, saloon, blacksmith and barber shop. *Sabe?* There will be plenty of room in the enclosed street for the fight, and the spectators will be up out of harm's way."

"I rise to applaud our foresighted citizen," states the judge. "You've got a beautiful thought, Wicksie."

"I don't know about the beauty of it, but she's plausible," agrees Magpie.

I meets Dirty Shirt, who is watching the digging of the post-holes, and he's seeking information. I explains the idea.

"Labor Day?" he asks. "Contest between a lion and a bull?"

Just then Magpie and the judge comes along.

"Who you fellers going to favor in this exhibition?" asks the judge. "Does you place your increment upon the chances of the feline or does you see grand prospects for the domestic quadruped?"

"My money stays in my overalls," states Dirty. "In a case like this I may dig a hole and bury it."

"Me," says I, "I feel as sorry for the lion as I do for the bull."

"Well, that settles that end of it," says the judge, happy-like.

"The question is what?" asks Dirty.

"We needs two neutral witnesses," explains Magpie. "This here will be some contest, you understand, and many pieces of silver will be wagered. Them what has bet their money will be prejudiced in one way or another, which makes them noways fit to judge upon the outcome. You and Dirty Shirt Jones are hereby honored with the distinction of being the referees of said contest and your decision will stand. *Sabe?*"

"Yes, even if the hills do fall," says the judge. "Judge without fear or favor and let nature take its course."

"And," says Magpie, "we also hereby appoints you both to go with me to Granite to purchase said lion."

Me and Dirty Shirt sets down on the sidewalk and looks at each other. After while Dirty says:

"What do I know about lions? Why ask me to help pick lions? I don't know a danged thing about lions."

"Neither do I," grins Magpie. "But I'm willin' to do my dangdest. This is for the community at large and in the sublime interests of Labor Day. Be public-spirited for once in your lives. This little task will be a labor of love. There won't be no remuneration nor pay. Just a labor of love, gents."

"Labor of love sounds poetical," nods Dirty.

"It will be appreciated."

"Yes," say I. "I hope they appreciate it, as the horse-thief said when the rope broke."

ME AND Magpie and Dirty Shirt and "Whiskers" went to Granite. I don't know how Whiskers happens to adopt us, but he does. "Mighty" Jones is Whiskers' lord and master, but I reckon Whiskers is one of the noble souls who arise above such masters as Mighty.

Way back in the dim and distant past Whiskers' ancestors were blooded dogs, I reckon, but they associated with the rank and file, the same of which makes poor Whiskers the mulligan of all mutts. He's big and hairy of face and according to Mighty he don't know "sic 'em."

We left our broncs at the stable and wandered up-town, with poor old Whiskers getting between our legs every time a strange dog shows up. The circus is there all right. It ain't a awful big circus, but Magpie argues that it's reasonable to suppose that their lions are just as big as the lions in a big circus.

Me and Dirty infests "Hoot" Duncan's saloon while Magpie acts important around the outskirts of the circus.

"What brings you here?" asks Hoot.

"Lion," says Dirty.

"Some folks can't tell the truth," agrees Hoot.

"Lion," says Dirty. "L-i-o-n."

"To buy one," says I. "Me and Dirty has been commissioned to buy a raging lion, Hoot. One of them African ones."

Just then a feller steps up to us and asks us to have a drink. He's one of them slick-looking jaspers, and I sort of loosens my gun.

"I own a lion," says he.

"Funny how me and you gets together," says Dirty. "How's your lion?"

"Very well. I own Pluto, the original man-eating terror of the Congo. He has killed seventeen keepers. Beautiful black mane and——"

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"We ain't in the rug business, so the state of his mane and tail don't cut no figure," says Dirty. "We just want a lion, thassall."

"After the show is loading tonight," says the feller, "I might fix it so you could drive right away with Pluto in his cage. I wouldn't want anybody to know it, 'cause Pluto is the big attraction of the circus."

"Don't ruin the circus on our account," says Dirty. "It ain't so danged necessary that we has a attraction, mister. Just slip us a lion."

"Say, who is buying this here lion?" asks Magpie's voice, and he horns into our midst. "I'm the lion-buyer."

"We was just dickerin'," says Dirty, grieved-like. "This gent owns a lion."

"How much can you pay?" asks the feller.

"I don't want no second-hand lion," states Magpie, and I can see that he's had several jolts of nerve tonic.

"Pluto ain't never been scratched."

"The price-tag says?"

"I'd rather talk privately to you," says the feller. "Let me and you take a little walk."

"Let 'em go, Ike," says Dirty, tearful-like. "If I can't buy a lion I'll buy little drink. Have little drink?"

It's the little things in life that count. Dirty Shirt has a peculiar way of knowing when he's got enough, and when he finds that he's up to capacity you couldn't get another drop into him even with one of them hypodermic squirt-guns.

Down in Piperock he always shoots at the little bell on top of the Mint Hall, and if he misses it three times in a row he quits drinking. Here he is in a strange place with no bell in sight and the feeling that he might be imbibing too much.

"C'mon, Ike," says he, tearful-like. "Let's go find shomethin' t' shoot at."

I couldn't 'a' hit the other side of the street with a shotgun, but I agreed that a target was necessary, and we started out with Whiskers tripping us up every time he hears a noise.

I don't know where we went, but after while I finds that me and Dirty are setting on a pile of canvas talking to a stranger. Dirty is crying like his heart was broke, and after while my ears get tuned proper-like and I hears some conversation.

"Lions don't amount to much," says the feller. "Lions ain't got no guts when it comes to fighting. You folks are going to be a lot disappointed. As I said before, you ought to have a tiger."

"Tha's a fact," sobs Dirty. "Nice li'l striped tagger. Wish we had one."

"Well, why not buy one?" asks the feller. "Sell you one for a hundred dollars cash."

"Zasso? Give you eight."

"Eight dollars? That would be robbery."

"Yuh might holler for the sheriff," says Dirty.

"Sell you one for a hundred dollars."

"Hunnerd dollars? Thanks. Wouldn't Piperock applaud us, Ike?"

"If I had a hundred dollars I wouldn't need applause," says I.

"Ain't you got nothing you could sell and get the hundred?"

"Mister," sobs Dirty, "I ain't got nothing left but my honor."

"Which makes you in debt up to your eyebrows," says I, and then I went to sleep.

I DON'T know how long I slept, but I know it was awful dark and raining hard when I woke up. My mouth feels raspy and in front of my eyes are black spots like the patent-medicine advertisements tell about. I finds a place where they sells glass-covered cheer, and then I hunts for Magpie and Dirty. They ain't in evidence, so I goes down to the stable, saddles my brown mare by the light of a lantern, and I'm just riding out, when "Foghorn" Foster steps into the door of the stable and says—

"Where yuh goin' with that animal?"

It's none of his business, and anyway I don't feel like arguing. I paid the bill when I left the horse there, so it ain't anybody's business where I'm going.

Foghorn acts excited and empties his gun at me as I went down the street. A couple of bullets hive up in the cantle of my saddle, but I just considers the source and keeps going.

It's about four miles to Wind River, and I sure fogged some in that rain. I figured that I'd catch Magpie and Dirty. I skidded down the bank of the river and into the water, and just then a flash of lightning gives me a view of something out of the ordinary.

It's one of them fancy circus-wagons, and it's stranded in the middle of the river. I rides out to it, and just then comes to my ears, sad and low—

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"Rocked in th' cra-a-a-dul of th' dee-e-e-p I lay me——"

"Dirty!" I yells. "What yuh wailing about?"

"The —— doubletree busted!" he howls, "The team is gone and me and poor Rajah are stranded in the ragin' flood." And then he begins singing—

"Secure I rest upon th' wa-a-a-a-ve——"

"Shut up, you danged fool!" I yelps. "Who is Rajah?"

"Tagger. Roarin', ragin' tagger. Seventeen stripes and whiskers like a Rooshun."

"Is there a tiger in that wagon?"

"Signed, sealed and de-livered."

"Where's Magpie?"

"I ain't Magpie's keeper—I'm tagger's keeper. Come and have a little drink, Ike."

"How did you get the money to buy a tiger? Did you sell your honor?"

"Tha's a shubjec' for deliberation. I don' jus' know how it comes about. It was dark and the circus was over and this feller helped me on thish wagon and he took my money and I— Well, the wheel hit a rock and the double-tree busted an— Aw, let's have a little drink, Ike."

"Where did the team go?"

"Tha's a —— of a question. I'm no palmist."

Dirty sets there on top of that wagon, humped up in the rain, and every time the lightning flashes I can see him taking a drink. I rides back out there, climbs up with him, and turns my bronc loose. I don't know why I done that, but it ain't the first locoed thing I've ever done.

We has a few drinks together, and then I humps up there with him. Man, it's raining in sheets, and that same old Wind River is one stream what can rise and shine.

"Sto-o-o-orm-e-e-e th' night and th' waves ro-o-o-o-ll high," wails Dirty. "Swiftly th' ship— Say, Ike, this danged thing's moving!"

COMES a longer flash of lightning and I notices that we've turned around and are pointed toward the Pacific Ocean.

"The anchor's busted!" yelps Dirty, and just then we hits a rock and almost upsets.

"Set still, you danged fool!" I yells.

"Cloud must 'a' busted!" yowls Dirty.

Man, I'd say it must have busted complete-like. Wind River ain't ordinarily a raging torrent, but this storm makes her rise plentiful. A couple of trees hooks up with us, and we have a regular parade.

"I wish I could get a message ashore," says Dirty. "Our bottle is almost empty. I'm so danged——"

But the wind blew the rest of it away.

It almost took me and Dirty with it. I feels a ripping crash under us and the danged craft whirls over sideways, and we climbs over and over that thing like one of them squirrel-cage riggings, and the thing sort of busts apart.

After while she hits her stride again, and me and Dirty has time to get our breath.

"We lost our runnin'-gear," cracks Dirty. "Lost our—my ——!" Dirty crawls over my lap, and I turns my head. There on the end of our craft shines a pair of eyes. I reckon Rajah's full to the gills with alkali water and his soul is sore within him.

"Kittie, kittie, kittie, kittie," says Dirty squeaky-like. "Nice kittie."

"Stop it!" I yells. "Nice little ——! Don't let on that you see him."

"We've got to ketch him, ain't we?" wails Dirty. "He cost us a hundred dollars, Ike, and we've got to ketch him, ain't we?"

"——, don't let that worry yuh," says I. "He ain't going to be no trouble that-a-way. Tigers are easy to catch."

Just then the wind spins our boat around and we has a hard time hanging on. I shakes a lot of water out of my eyes and hears Dirty say—

"Now—now, don't be so —— tame!"

The boat give another whirl, and I grabs for Dirty—and I think I got Rajah by the tail. Man, there was something doing about that time.

"*Yar-r-oo-o-o-o-o-o!*" yowls Rajah, and just then we hits a reef, and everything goes into the flood. I reckon that danged striped cat turned a flip-flop and lit on top of me in the river.

I ain't no tiger-hunter. None of my folks as far back as I can hear about has ever lost any wild animals, but I has presence of mind enough to drown the danged thing if possible.

First I'm under and then the cat is under. We sure played tag all over Wind River and it was some embrace, I'd tell a man. There is times when the danged thing don't struggle at all, and again it tries to show its authority a heap.

Then we skids out on a sand-bar and rolls high out of the water. I knowed I

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ain't much on fighting tigers on dry land and with bare hands and I tries to pull my gun, but finds that I ain't even got a belt left. The tiger lays plumb still, so I figures to sneak away as easy as possible. I'm crawling through the mud when I hears a voice speak, very low—

"I reckon the —— thing got a plenty or it thinks I'm dead."

"What —— thing?" I asks.

"Shut up!" hisses Dirty. "That tiger just left me. Keep still and maybe it will go away. I had it danged near drowned."

"All right," says I, weak-like. "I'll keep still about it, Dirty Shirt."

"I think we better go somewhere," says Dirty, after while. "My feet are all wet."

"Your feet? Is that all?"

"I said 'feet'," says he, peevish-like. "My feet are—oh——!"

I glances around, and there in the dark near where Dirty Shirt must be is a pair of bright and shining eyes.

"The —— fool don't know when he's got enough," wails Dirty. "Kittie, kittie, kittie! Nice little kittie!"

"*Wr-r-oof!*"

I hears a *thud*, and them lights go out.

"Don't monkey with me," states Dirty Shirt, hoarse-like. "Don't do it. I'd just as soon hit a tagger with a rock as a ——"

Them lights open up just about in the same spot, and the next second Dirty bumps me and we went down together. I didn't stay down—not me. Self-preservation is strong within me and my mind is fancy-free. I bounced right to my feet and I just ran.

It was so dark I couldn't see a danged thing, but I went somewhere. I reckon Dirty Shirt went somewhere too. I hit the road, and behind me I can hear the panting exhaust of that man-eatin' tiger. It didn't spur me to further efforts, 'cause a human being can only go just so fast anyway.

It's raining awful hard, but I knowed when I went into the next ford, 'cause it knocked my feet out from under me and I turns dismal flip-flops until I lands high, but not dry, on the sand-bar. I manages to crawl up out of the flood and just then I hears very hoarse-like—

"Kittie, kittie, kittie, kittie! Nice kittie," and then a rock comes along and bounces off my vertebray.

"What do you think you are throwing rocks at?" I asks.

There is silence for a moment, and then Dirty says, complaining-like—

"Run in a circle, —— the luck!"

"Think you did?" I pants.

"Think ——! I know I did. No human bein' could keep ahead of me at the speed I went. Where's the tagger, Ike?"

"Must 'a' been behind you," says I, "'cause it's a cinch he wasn't in front of me."

Just then we hears something splashing the water. It blows some water out of its throat, and then we hears it grunt as it comes out of the water.

"Lay still!" croaks Dirty. "Taggers won't hurt dead things."

"Likely not," says I. "But neither will anything else."

Me and Dirty are close together, so we lays down and don't move. We can hear the tiger sniffin' around us, and we almost has heart-disease when it shakes the water off itself. I got most of that water in my face. Then the tiger licked me right in the nose with its tongue. Man, I rose right up and took that tiger by the face.

I ain't no fighter, but I don't allow no danged convict cat to get familiar with me that-a-way. I'm mad. I clasped that cat to my bosom, looked it right in the face and then cast it back into the flood.

"My ——! What was that?" squeaks Dirty when he hears the splash.

"Whiskers!" I yelps.

"Whiskers? The faithful old thing. He—he came to find us."

"Yes," say I. "After somebody locked him in a cage and sold him to you. You —— fool!"

Me and Dirty crawled off the sand-bar and headed for Piperock down that muddy road, squashing along through the mud and rain.

After while I says:

"You sure done well, Dirty. You might at least 'a' got a tiger."

"Uh-huh, I might, Ike, but where'd we been? I can see the lights of Piperock. If we'd 'a' got a real tagger, we'd never lived to see them welcome lights, and—and today is the glorious Labor Day, Ike. If I'd got a taggar instead of Whiskers we'd never lived to see old Piperock celebrate Labor Day."

"—— Whiskers!" says I.

We plodded around the outskirts of the town and went to my cabin, where we

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chucked off our muddy clothes and went to bed.

IT WAS afternoon when we woke up. I hears a few shots, so I shakes Dirty loose from a large snore and we gets dressed.

Piperock sure looks queer. There's a tall stockade built right across the street, and beyond that is all mystery to us. From the number of horses and vehicles I'd say that Yaller Rock County came to the party.

We meets "Hassayampa" Harris from Curlew, and Hassayampa is tearfully intoxicated. He hands us a quart and talks of the wrongs of mankind.

"I've spent sixty dollars in chances on that lion, two dollars to behold the performances, and I've lost all my tickets."

"Tell 'em about it," says Dirty, prying his teeth loose from the neck of the bottle. "Claim what's yours, Hassayampa."

"Yeah?" Hassayampa looks sad-like at the bottle. "Yeah? With 'Scenery' Sims at the one ladder, the ladder where my ticket is good, and the rest of the seats all took? I explains to Scenery, but he's hard of hearing."

"Shoot him," advises Dirty. "Make him listen to reason."

"He's got a riot-gun, Dirty—one of them end-loaders, and she's got a handful of horse-shoe nails in each barrel. Dang the luck, I helped Pete Gonyer load it—before I started to mourn my loss. We heard that Paradise was contemplatin' free seats, and we took certain measures to change their minds."

"We'll get in all right," says I. "We're the referees."

"Referees? Say, ain't there something I can help yuh at?"

"Dirty," says I, "let loose of that bottle and tell the gent what he can do for us. Can we use him?"

"No question about it, Ike. C'mon, Hassayampa, and may the best man win."

We went all around behind them buildings, but there's only one ladder still in contact with the earth, so we starts up.

"You can't come up here!" squeaks Scenery, shoving that muzzle-loader over the edge into my face. "Git down, dang yuh!"

"We're the referees," says I. "Git that hen-hawk sprayer behind thee and let us officials up."

"No such thing has been said to me," says Scenery. "I'm here to see that nobody gets up free. Where's your tickets?"

"I lost mine," says Hassayampa.

"Go find it," grins Scenery, and the danged little squeaky-voiced cross between a rusty hinge and a coyote kicked the ladder loose.

I don't know yet in just what order we hit the earth, but I know that me and Dirty Shirt got tangled in the ladder, one end of which was hooked over a saddle-horn on a bronc, which was tied to a wagon-wheel. There ain't no ties which binds a bronc in a case like that, and me and Dirty Shirt seemed to get a travois ride which we didn't ask for.

The bronc seems to skid into the back door of Rickey's barber-shop, busted the door open and also loses the saddle, the same of which lets us stop with nothing worse than the loss of memory and some skin.

I comes back to earth and hears a lot of cheering, and there is Hassayampa standing by the busted door, grinning like a fool.

Dirty Shirt is setting there making motions like he was swimming I reckon he thinks he's still in Wind River with the tiger.

"What's the joke?" I asks, and Hassayampa points at the busted door.

"They locked all the back doors," says he. "But the bronc opened this'n. Let's go inside and watch the show through the front window."

We dragged Dirty Shirt inside, fastened the door and then went up to the front window. We can see the crowd on top of the Mint Hall and on Pete's blacksmith shop, and as far as we can see there's a solid line of humanity on top of the stockade.

Me and Hassayampa imbibes from his bottle while we congratulates each other on having such a lovely view of the arena.

"Ringside sheats," says Hassayampa. "Right where we can shee——"

"Heh, heh, heh, heh," says Dirty, sort of jerky-like.

I looks down at him, sitting with his back against the door, and he's sort of jerking his shoulders and making funny noises with his lips.

"He'll be all right," says Hassayampa. "He's——"

Hassayampa's voice gets weak, and I turns my head.

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BETWEEN us and the back door stands what I'd decipher to be Pluto!

Pluto don't seem a danged bit surprized at meeting us. He's one of them every-day sort of lions which is classed as King of Beasts. He yawns at us and sets there sort of dignified-like.

"Heh, heh, heh," says Dirty, like he had a fishbone in his throat.

"Well," says Hassayampa, offhanded-like, "there ain't nothin' much we can do, is there? The front door is locked."

"Why don't you shoot it?" I asks. "Where's your gun?"

"I know how it comes that the lion is in here," says Hassayampa, ignoring my question. "They locked him in here this morning. Notice that Rickey's stuff is all moved?"

"Reckon we ought to applaud your knowledge?" I asks. "The fact that you knows how the lion happens to be in here ain't going to temper the wind to the shorn lamb none to speak about. I'd admire to see you kill it."

"Heh, heh, heh," says Dirty.

From outside comes the roar of the multitude and we hears the rumbling of a he-cow, evidently searching deep for sounds to tell how bad he is.

"They've got the bull in Pete's shop," states Hassayampa. "Got the front door fixed so they can lift the bar from above with a rope."

"*Yeow-o-o-o-oof!*" yawns Pluto.

Just then Dirty Shirt shakes his head a few times and gets to his feet. He stares at us and then at the lion. He rubs his eyes and looks around.

"I reckon we didn't get up that ladder, eh?" says he, foolish-like.

Just then comes a awful roar from the multitude, and I takes a chance on turning my back on the lion. I sees the door of Pete's shop open and out comes Calamity. That bull skids plumb into the middle of the street and then throws up its head to observe the assemblage. Calamity had got a flag fastened to his horns and it makes him a heap inconsolable.

Just then I hears a scraping noise in front of our lion's den, and I sees a rope yank a bar loose, and the front door swings open. Pluto licks his lips and takes a couple of steps toward us, peering at the open door. Then he sets down and yawns.

Dirty Shirt edges slow-like to the door, starts to step outside and then turns right around and steps inside again. We can hear the multitude yelling for the lion to come out and get licked. I reckon a lot of folks favor the bull.

Then Pluto seems to get a longing to go outside. He shakes himself and coughs like a locomotive and then he begins sneaking up on us.

"Gents," quavers Hassayampa, "the time is drawin' nigh when we've got to choose between bein' clawed by a lion or gored by a bull. What does you vote, Ike?"

"Democratic!" I yelps and went out of that door on the wing.

I know something about bulls, but lions are plumb unknown. I whirled around the corner of the door just in time to see Hassayampa fall flat in the doorway, and over his prostrate body goes Pluto, and hanging on to Pluto's tail, bouncing along on his high-heels, is Dirty Shirt.

Comes an awful yell from the audience, and above its call sounds Yuma Yates' voice:

"Leggo that lion! Leggo, daw-gone yuh! You can't handicap my bets."

Pluto skids to a stop in the middle of the arena, and Dirty stands there hanging on to the lion's tail and looking around foolish-like.

"*Yar-r-r-r-oo-o-o-o!*" yowls Pluto, the same of which put the fear deep into Calamity's heart, and that danged bull twists his tail over his back and comes right straight at me.

Man, I reverts to my ancestors right then and proceeds to climb up one of the porch posts. I did well—while the post lasted. Calamity must 'a' hit it head center, and unjointed it from the top and bottom at the same time.

I seems to get a zigzag view of the surroundings and then I finds myself straddle of that 'onery blue bull with both arms wrapped around that porch post. We went some. Hassayampa went some too. Hassayampa was just in front of Calamity, while out in the middle of the arena is Dirty Shirt, trying his dangest to hang on to that lion's tail and keep it from doubling back on him.

I lost my porch post on the second lap of the arena, and about that time I'm of the opinion that the hump of a bull's shoulders ain't no fitting place for comfort. By this time I reckon everybody is enjoying the spectacle and I gets advice in large quantities.

We passed Hassayampa on the first lap

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and I'm wondering where he is, when the bull starts pitching and I slides down on his neck and gets him by the horns. I looks back once and I sees Hassayampa coming along behind, taking ten-foot steps and hanging on to the bull's tail.

Pluto seems to get the speed fever, and the first thing I know he's inching past me still towing Dirty Shirt, who is running wild-eyed and reckless. He glances up through the dust and yells—

"Come on you—snail!"

Some folks never seem to want to let well enough alone. I was all right—and so was Calamity. Maybe we both was a little mixed as to distance and direction, but that wasn't no reason for outside interference. Pluto was running on his own side of the track, and as long as he kept going Dirty Shirt was O. K.

I glanced up once and I seen Magpie standing on the edge of Buck Masterson's saloon-front, whirling a rope, while behind him stands Buck, Judge Steele and Wick Smith. It appears that them last three constitutes the snubbing-post, being as there ain't hardly ever any snubbing-posts built on top of saloons.

They braces themselves behind that false front. Magpie sure can drop a nasty loop. It dropped over one of Calamity's horns and around my waist—and us going forty miles in no time. I'm betting that when we takes up the slack I ain't over seven inches around the waist, and it cinches me plumb tight to Calamity's horn. I turned my head and looked up and I seen four men and part of Buck's saloon-front yank high and handsome, and then me and Calamity turns a handspring.

I hears four distinct thumps before me and Calamity hits upside down, and then my candle seems to flicker. I know before I hit that I'm dead as ——. I know that my race is run and I finished about three-thirty. My past rose up before me, and looking backward, I ain't afraid to die. Sometimes it's a heap easier to die than to live, and I thought—

"They might have another celebration."

AFTER while I seems to sort of get a hazy idea of what is going on, and I finds myself still roped to Calamity, but Calamity ain't doing much. I'm setting on his neck, and it appears they've forgot to take off the rope.

Quite a lot of Piperock is gathered around and several of 'em are talking all at once. I gets my eyes focused straight and I appears to behold a fat feller, wearing a red fancy vest and a gaudy watch-chain, and he's waving his fat hands a heap as he talks.

"I paid our good money just the same," says Magpie. "I acted in good faith."

"I don't care a hang what you done!" howls the fat man. "I own that circus. Just because you darn rubes ain't got no better sense than to buy a lion from some tin-horn gambler who never owned as much as a coyote-skin rug, you think everything is O. K.

"Somebody else got away with the parade-wagon, which didn't have anything in it, but we found the team. What I want now is my lion, or a hundred dollars. Where is my lion? Eh?"

"Ike," squeaks Scenery Sims, and he elbows his way up to me, "Ike, I've got to arrest you for stealing a horse."

"What horse?"

"Mine," says Foghorn Foster. "Brown mare with Circle Dot on her left shoulder. Dirty Shirt sold her to me for fifty dollars."

"I want my lion or a hundred dollars," says the fat man. "That lion was worth a thousand dollars," says the fat man.

"Not for fightin' purposes," says Magpie.

"You'll have to come to jail, Ike," says Scenery.

"Lion or a hundred dollars," says Fatty.

"Where is Dirty Shirt?" I asks.

"He's where the lion is, I reckon," says Buck. "The last I seen of them they was going in the window of the Mint Hall, and Dirty still had the lion by the tail."

I feel a movement under me and I looks down at Calamity. He's opening and shutting his eyes, and them eyes are green as grass. Calamity dead? Say, that bull ain't even sick—he's mad.

"I'll take that hundred dollars or sue——"

Boof!

I seen Magpie reach out one foot, hook it behind Fatty's heels and lift hard. The circus feller upends and lands right in my arms. We sprawls all over that prostrate bull, and I reckon that is all Calamity needs to bring him to life.

Did he arise? He did. With me and Fatty on his neck and shoulders he got right up among that group of folks and started out to make things interesting. Calamity don't look around to sort of get

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his bearings like any self-respecting bull would.

He just bowed his back, plowed ahead, slipped one horn under Foghorn's belt and started going plentiful and strong. Scenery must 'a' handed Foghorn that shotgun when he makes the arrest, 'cause time Calamity swings his head them gawping muzzles seems to brush my eyebrows.

"Lemme go! Oh, lemme go!" howls the circus man.

"Go?" yells Foghorn, waving that shotgun. "What in —— do you think you're doing now?"

"Pow-w-w-w-w-der River-r-r-r-r-r!" howls the gang perched on the reserved seats, and the some misguided *hombres* begins to take shots at us.

Magpie has the right idea of stopping a bull. He hops in front of Calamity and tosses a blanket over the bull's head. The idea was good, but Magpie slipped getting back, and Calamity knocked him half-way across the street.

"One baby down—one see-e-e-gar!" howls somebody, and just then Calamity quits running circles and points straight for the open door of the barber-shop.

I seen Foghorn try to dodge, but it ain't no use, and the thought, "He'll never prosecute you, Ike," flashes through my brain. Just then comes a crash. The door wasn't wide enough, so Calamity took part of the building out in widening it. In fact there were two crashes—going in and coming out.

When I got the shingle-nails, plaster and *Police Gazettes* out of my eyes, and the dandruff ad picture from around my neck, we're outside and going fast and free.

The fat circus man is still with us. I've got one arm hooked around his neck, and he's got my sleeve in his teeth. In one hand he's got a shaving-mug and in the other a door-knob.

Foghorn is on his stummick across the bull's neck, still hanging on to that shotgun, although his thoughts are not of mundane things. Of course I sees all these details in sort of a dazed way. I looks back towards Piperock, but the old town has faded away in a dim and distant past.

Then I turns to reason out our probable destination. As far as I can prognosticate we're headed for Canada, but between us and the realm of the Canuck is one gosh-awful deep washout, where alkali mud reigns supreme and sticky.

I tried to disengage myself from the fat man and the bull, but I'm asleep from my Adam's apple to my boots. I starts to think that this is a queer state of affairs, when I feels the front end of Calamity drop sudden-like, and then I says to me—

"Nothing but horseshoe luck will ever bring you back to your friends, Mister Harper."

And then I spread my pinions and flew. I never felt so free in my life. I hears two noises like *Hee-e-e-e-e! Hee-e-e-e-e!* going past me, and far below me comes two faint reports. I says to myself—

"Foghorn, you're a danged poor wing shot."

Then I tries to soar like a buzzard, but I reckon something was wrong with my soarer, so I turned over a few times just to show that it could be done, and then somebody seems to throw the whole country at me.

FAT THE TIME I sort of wondered why I didn't bounce. I wondered why they didn't quit ringing the church bells and then I wondered who would inherit my brown mare, now that me and Foghorn are both dead. Then I begins to feel sort of cold and clammy, and I says to me:

"Your circulation is over, Ike. You're deader than ——."

Then I sat up and clawed the mud out of my eyes.

Above me is Calamity, sitting on his rump on that slippery bank, digging his hoofs into the mud and shaking his head like he objected to everything on earth.

On the other side of the washout is Foghorn hanging by the slack of his clothes to a snag. He's just about as animated as an old suit of clothes, and as I'm looking at him there comes a slight tearing sound, and he drops flat on his face in the mud in the bottom.

From beside him raises a big gob of mud which gradually takes the form of a man. Two gobby hands come up and mop the mud off its face, and I beholds our circus man. Calamity stares down at us, waving his big head and making a mournful noise deep in his throat, which sounds like—

"I'm-m-m-m-m-m-m goin' ho-o-o-o-o-o-me."

"So am I," says I, and then I tries to stand up in that mud-hole!

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"Er-r-r-r-row-w-w-w-w! Hu-u-u-u-u-h!"

I turns my head. Right up the bottom of that wash-out, squashing along in that mud comes Pluto, covered with the gooey stuff, and right behind him wabbles Dirty Shirt Jones, hanging on to Pluto's tail with one hand and a section of two-by-four in the other. Dirty has got his shirt and boots on yet, but he's depending on mud for the rest of his raiment.

Pluto stops and wails loud-like, but Dirty wallops him with the club and they come on.

I claws my way out of their line of march, but when Pluto sees me he refuses to go any further and sets down.

"Howdy, Dirty," says I. "Breakin' the thing to drive with a jerk-line?"

"Huh—huh—huh—" says he, staring at me.

He looks at the rest of the bunch, and then stares at Calamity.

"I've had a —— of a time—you know it?" he whispers. "Me 'n' th' lion. I've got the —— thing licked, y'betcha. I tol' him I was goin' to run him ragged fer jerkin' me out of the back winder of the Mint Hall. Fell thirty feet."

"Why didn't you let loose of his tail?"

"I ain't loco!" he wails. "Long as I've got hold of that end he can't bite me, can he?"

"When he went out of the window," says I, "why didn't you let loose then?"

"My ——! A feller can't think of everything, can he?" and just then Dirty seems to get a better view of the circus man. Dirty blinks the mud out of his eyes and then lets loose of Pluto's tail and takes the club in both hands.

"Set where you are!" he snaps at the lion, and that King of Beasts seems to sort of shrink into the mud. Then Dirty comes sneaking ahead until he comes up to the circus man, where he stops and glares down at him.

"That man owns the circus," says I.

"Yeah?" says Dirty. "He's the son-of-a-gun who sold me the tagger."

"I—I was fuf-foolin'," says the feller. "I—I—it ain't my circus. I don't own the lion. I—I figured I could scare them into payin'——"

Dirty reaches down, yanks the feller to his feet and turns him around facing Foghorn, who is trying to understand with his ears full of mud.

"Give him a hundred dollars," orders Dirty.

The circus feller digs a roll of bills out of his pockets and hands 'em to Dirty, who peels off a hundred and hands it to Foghorn, who acts like he didn't understand.

"We're buying them horses back!" yells Dirty.

"I'm going back, too," says Foghorn, whose ears are so full of mud that he couldn't hear the crack of doom. He wades out of the mud, starts to climb the opposite bank, and gets almost to Calamity before he sees him. Then he whirls and starts running along that slippery bank.

Calamity needed some bait like that to take his mind off other things, and he gets right up, skids into a run and follers poor old Foghorn.

They're both running about twenty-five miles an hour, and getting ahead about two. The last we seen of 'em it was about an even bet. Then we sizes up our circus man.

"What was your official capacity with that circus?" asks Dirty.

"Shell game."

"How much money you got?"

"How much? None of your —— business!"

"That ain't much," admits Dirty. "But we're having a sale. Come on."

He leads the gambler around behind Pluto, and that black-maned terror of the Congo just shudders and sets there drooling. Then Dirty picks up the lion's tail and puts it in the gambler's hand. Then he peels off a few bills from the gambler's roll and put 'em in his pocket.

"Witness a fair sale, Ike," says Dirty. "Going, going, gone! Sold! Mister, you've bought something."

"I don't want no lion!" wails the feller.

"Hang on to that tail!" snaps Dirty, and then he steps in and hits Pluto across the ribs with his scantling. Pluto yowls back at us and then starts on through that mud, searching deep inside his bosom for sounds to tell how much he misses his nice circus home while the mud-covered gambler oozes and squashes along behind him, hanging on to Pluto's tail.

"He can't hurt you if you don't let loose," yells Dirty, and we stands there and watches 'em travel up the mucky bottom of that washout—a dazed gambler and a disgusted lion, going no place and without a reason on earth.

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"Pluto will likely kill him," says I.

"What with?" asks Dirty. "He ain't got no teeth nor claws left. He's a lion in name only, Ike, and I reckon the gambler is the more dangerous of the two."

MAGPIE was just limping up to the cabin door as we came around the corner. He looks us over solemn-like and then sets down on the steps.

"I ain't got the heart to chide yuh," says he. "Not after seeing what happened to yuh. Everybody got their money back except the fifty I paid for the lion."

"My gosh!" grunts Dirty. "I overcharged for Pluto.

And then he hands Magpie fifty dollars. Magpie looks at the money and puts it in his pocket without asking a question. Me and Dirty sets down with him, and the three of us sets for quite a while in silence.

After while Magpie scratches his ear and observes—

"There will always be a question which is the best fighter—the lion or the bull, 'cause the way things broke it was impossible to tell which won."

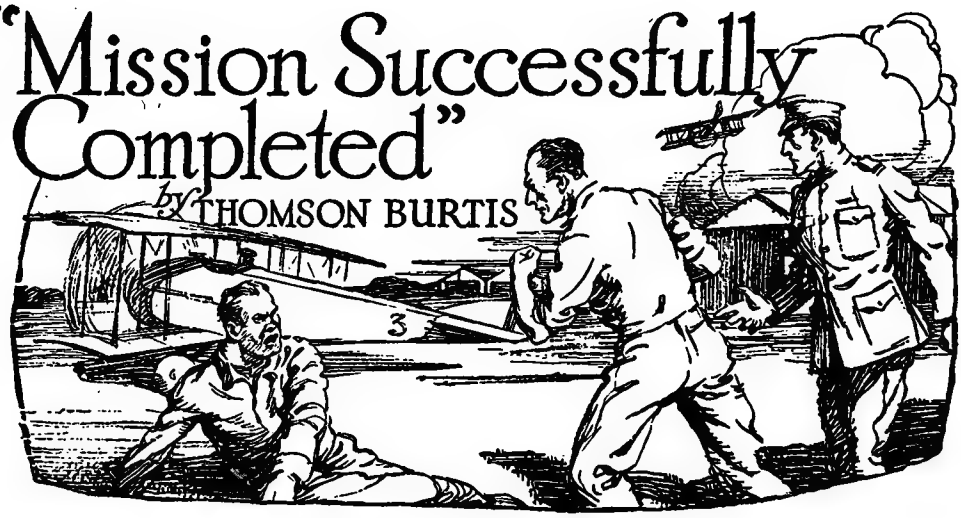
"I know who lost," says Dirty, digging a hunk of mud out of his hair. "Piperock got something for nothing, didn't they? Maybe it wasn't much, gents, but it was something. Now, us three went plumb to Granite, suffered the pangs of—Magpie, didn't you say something about us bein' laborers of love? Didn't yuh? Ain't we the losers?"

"Love's labor loses," nods Magpie. "Don't it sound poetical?"

"Up to a certain point she was poetical," says Dirty. "But after she gets past that point she's what 'Muley' Bowles would designate as 'blank verse.'"

"Mission Successfully Completed"

by THOMSON BURTIS



LIEUTENANT GERALD CARTER, better known as Jerry, was chief test pilot of the Mechanics' School at Donovan Field. At this precise moment he was the focal point of at least a thousand pairs of eyes which were observing him from various parts of the great, two-mile-square aviation field below him. He was engaged in testing the first Sopwith Scout that had ever made its appearance on or above the biggest flying-field in the country. The diminutive rotary-motored fighter had been scooting hither and yon across the sky for a number of minutes, causing admiring comments from the airmen below at its tremendous speed and lightning-like changes of direction.

Jerry himself was the temporary inmate of a flyer's paradise. Not since he had returned from overseas had he had his hands on a Sopwith—the little bug-like ship that had helped make the Bishops and Proctors and Trails of war aviation. For half an hour he had watched every wire, tested the motor on every possible combination of cylinders, and noted each oscillation of the

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hands on the instrument-board before him.

"O. K.," he finally announced to himself, and settled back in the cockpit.

A slow pull on the stick, and the tiny ship purred over on its back and swooped down out of a perfect loop. Followed three more, and half of a fourth. But this time he pushed forward on the stick as he reached the peak of the arc. The rotary motor, equally effective whether upside down or right side up, fired steadily. The full length of Donovan Field was covered in a trice, upside down. Coming out, he used his speed to send him into three barrel rolls, the ship screwing through the air horizontally.

A vertical bank, sudden application of full-top rudder, and the Sopwith shot toward the ground, upended on the point of one wing. Fifty feet from the ground, as the roof of a hangar rose to meet his wing-tip, he kicked out of the slip, leveled off above the ground, skidded to kill his speed and landed lightly.

Major Stratton turned to the captain who was standing beside him on the line.

"Sure can handle a ship," he commented as the Sopwith taxied to the line, finding a niche among the dozen ships standing on the blocks.

The tall young flier threw two long legs over the side of the cockpit and leaped to the ground, greeting the major with a flash of white teeth streaking his oil-grimed face.

"How does she go?" queried the major eagerly.

"Like a top, sir," replied the test pilot, pushing up his goggles. "You boys sure have a treat coming," he added to his fellow lieutenants who were clustering around the pint-size plane.

"When she's filled with gas and oil have her warmed up for me," ordered the major. "By the way, Carter, what have you been up to lately?"

"Nothing special, sir," responded the puzzled flier.

"Thought maybe you had," grinned the major. "Anyway the C. O. wants to see you right away over at Headquarters, Field Two. The order is in your office now—just came through. Better shake it up."

Jerry proceeded to shake it up. A few terse orders to the mechanics, a quick wash at the sink in the hangar, and he was on his way in a fast traveling sidecar. All the way over to the main field he wondered what the colonel could want with him; but as he entered the sacred precincts of headquarters he was as much in the dark as ever, for he could think of no recent infraction of rules that would justify a personal interview with Colonel Mills.

Fifteen minutes later he floated out of the colonel's office on air, his head in the clouds. For the gray-haired, square-jawed C. O. had informed him that he, Jerry, had been selected as the new flight commander of the Department Headquarters Flight. He had been touched with the royal scepter of flying.

The Department Flight was composed of six ships, the best of their types, reserved for the use of the Department Air Service officers at the near-by headquarters of the greatest military department in the United States—the department where nearly half the regular army was stationed, and which supervised a series of great flying-fields and the border patrol along the Rio Grande from Eagle Pass to San Diego. The Department Flight Commander must be something of everything in the flying game—a skilled engineer officer, to keep the planes and motors in perfect shape; an experienced test pilot; a skilful and unusually experienced all-round flier, for there would be men with two stars on their shoulders who would trust themselves to him on long trips to the border on pressing government business. The death of some of those men would be headline material for newspapers all over the country.

And the flight commander must be an instructor, teaching some of the non-flying officers in the department office how to handle one of the powerful but frail contrivances that so regularly take their toll of even the most experienced airmen.

All these things passed through Carter's mind in a whirling, happy jumble as he walked toward Hangar Twenty-three, which housed the Headquarters Flight. He had known that Eric Fall, who at twenty-seven was one of the grand old men of the flying game, had been ordered on a transcontinental flight, leaving Headquarters assignment open, but he had never in his rosiest dreams imagined himself as a candidate to follow him. And with a sudden squaring of his jaw Jerry made up his mind that he would match the job if it was in him.

Hangar Twenty-three was one of a mile-long row of sprawling white hangars that skirted the northern edge of Field Two.

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As he entered the big concrete-floored shed he was met by Sergeant Jordan, whose leathery countenance was split by an ear-to-ear smile of welcome. Jordan had been a non-com in the Twenty-second Squadron in France, with which organization Jerry had put in many an eventful hour over the lines.

"Greet your new boss, Jordan!" announced Jerry.

"I heard you was coming here, lieutenant. Don't make you mad any, does it?"

"Not so you could notice it," laughed Jerry. "Now let's see how we're sitting."

With Jordan he looked over the ships—not that he had not often examined them before, but now it was with possessive pride that he admired them. Over in one corner was a Fokker scout—that boche masterpiece which he had fought against so often, and which had taken a fearful toll of Allied airmen in the big scrap. Alongside it, an ironical stable-mate, was the private S. E. 5 scout of Colonel Feldmore, Department Air Service officer. The graceful, trim little single-seater looked like the female of the species alongside its ugly German counterpart and many-time opponent during the war.

Another S. E. 5 nestled alongside, flanked by the great black-and-white camouflaged Le Père, its ugly snout masking a 400 horsepower Liberty motor. That was a two-seated fighter, and the fastest thing on the field. Jerry knew it was good for a hundred and thirty miles an hour, air-speed, any old time.

Bulking even larger than the Le Père was the specially built blue-green and gold De Haviland, known from one end of the department to the other. When the *Bluebird* appeared above an airdrome, the gold of its wings gleaming in the sun, those below knew that a personage was on his way on Headquarters business. Jerry could not repress a thrill of pride as he visioned himself at the stick, the aerial courier of the department.

Looking ridiculously small, albeit business-like, alongside its big brother was a little French Spad, dividing the combat honors of the air with the boche ship at the far end.

The roll was completed with the two-seated training-plane in which Jerry would give instruction to men who ranked him many grades, but who would look up to him as eagerly as children as they learned to navigate the air.

Jerry took a deep breath as he surveyed his stable of ships.

"Some line-up; eh, sir?" Jordan asked proudly.

"Right," responded his chief. "Now let's get in the office and you can tell me how we stand on men and supplies."

The regular complement of the flight was ten mechanics and riggers. At present there were only nine, Jordan told him, but a tenth man named Samansky was due to report that day.

Samansky! Jerry whistled softly. He knew Samansky. Not so long ago, over at the Mechanics' School, he had been officer of the day when Samansky was on guard, and had found him lying behind a lumber-pile in the deep shadow, talking with a furtive-looking civilian who had slunk off swiftly. It had cost Samansky three months' pay, a demotion from sergeant to private and a probationary guard-house sentence when the court martial convened.

And from that day the sullen foreigner had never looked at the young officer without smoldering hatred in his eyes. He had long had the reputation of being a bad actor. He was also a good mechanic if he felt like it; and that was seldom enough.

"That's isn't so good," mused Jerry abstractedly, gazing through the wire screening that partitioned off the office from the hangar proper. "This bird Samansky is good when he wants to be, which isn't very often, but he's a tough egg and he hates me like a rattlesnake."

"We'll keep on his tail and see that he doesn't fourflush around here," stated Jordan with emphasis. "I don't quite see why they sent him to this flight, though, at that. I've heard of him. They usually give us the best there is."

Jerry didn't know either, and he was wondering about it as he turned to the shipping-tickets for supplies. Then a sudden thought struck him that made him grin in spite of himself. Colonel Mills and Colonel Feldmore were close friends, and it was just like them to palm off a firebrand like Samansky on him just to find out what the new Department Flight Commander was made of. According to his record Samansky was a perfect try-out specimen.

"That's the answer, I'll bet a nickel," Jerry communed with himself on his trip

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back to the other field. "And if Samansky gets gay he's going to have one —— of a time right in this flight. If I have to put him in the guard-house, I'll consider myself licked."

TWO days later came the written orders relieving Lieutenant Gerald Carter as chief test pilot of the Mechanics' School and assigning him to his new duty. And that same morning Jordan entered the office, saluted and announced that Private Samansky was reporting for duty.

The squat, sullen-faced mechanic entered, dressed in greasy coveralls, and saluted sloppily without raising his eyes from the floor.

"All right, Samansky; stand at ease," remarked Jerry, swinging around in his chair. "You've got a good chance to make good here on a job worth while. And I'm going to say right here that I'm not holding anything in your past record against you. You're starting clean as far as I'm concerned. On the other hand, you've got to come across with all you've got or you're going to have a long row to hoe. Do you understand?"

An indistinguishable rumble came from the man before him, and for just an instant his eyes were raised from the floor to meet Jerry's level regard. Then they dropped again, and without waiting for an order he turned to leave.

"Wait a minute," snapped Jerry. "You will go back to your barracks immediately, shave and clean yourself up. Show up here again in an hour, and don't ever let me catch you around here again looking like a hobo."

"Yes, sir," responded Samansky softly with just a trace of dialect.

But the meekness of his tone was given the lie by the look of hatred that flashed toward the young officer at the desk. Just for an instant; then his eyes sought the floor again, and he wheeled and slouched out.

"Watch that bird like a hawk, Jordan," commanded Jerry when Samansky was out of hearing.

"Leave it to me, sir," replied the confident Jordan, and took himself off to superintend the busy mechanics who were filling the ships with gas and oil, cleaning distributors, wiping off wings and preparing them for the day's flying.

It was a busy day for Jerry. That morning he took all the ships up for brief test flights, and with the exception of a few unimportant changes found them in perfect condition; motors roaring with even rhythm and wires taut and strong.

In the afternoon came Colonel Feldmore, a tall, spare man with a rough-hewn face and the reputation of being the most genial, democratic man in the Army when all was going well, but a devastating cyclone in human form when he was displeased. He was either for or against a man through and through, and if he was against him, when the storm was over that man usually found himself considerably damaged.

With a few kindly words for Jerry, who already knew the chief slightly, he announced that he wanted to go up in the *Bluebird* as a passenger. The group of flyers who had gathered around Headquarters hangar for a chat with the "Old Man," who was always ready to talk flying, exchanged knowing winks. Jerry was due for a tryout, and no one knew it better than himself.

He tried as he never had before to handle the great De Haviland smoothly, without skid or slip. At three thousand feet he struck the high-piled fleecy cumulus clouds that always float lazily through the sky on a Texas afternoon. Keeping a wary eye out for other ships, he dived, zoomed and circled the snowy masses of mist, handling his big ship with the delicacy and smoothness that only hundreds of hours in the air can give a man.

For fifteen minutes the two airmen reveled in cool air above the baking field. Then Jerry pointed the nose down, spiraling earthward gradually with half-throttled motor. He leveled out carefully, and as the speed dropped inched the tail down. Just as the ship seemed almost to stop a moment in the air he gave the stick a last pull backward; the tail dropped and they mushed through the air, hitting the ground lightly for a perfect three-point landing.

The colonel jumped out of the back seat and waved to him as he turned off the gas and ran the motor out.

"Great stuff, son," he shouted, and walked over toward his gleaming little S. E. 5, which darling of his heart was straining at the blocks while Sergeant Jordan warmed it up.

After the colonel had taken off, Jerry turned to the sergeant.

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"What was the argument with Samansky just before we went up?" he inquired.

Jordan sent a baleful glare toward Samansky, who was wielding a sickle on the grass next to the hangar.

"Mr. Sourface is acting up," he said. "Latest thing was catching him smoking in the hangar, so he's due for fatigue till tomorrow night. He don't seem to give much of a —— for any regulations whatsoever, but a little elbow-grease'll help him out."

"Keep after him," returned his chief. "And we're going to handle him ourselves. No guard-house or anything else; understand?"

"Very good, sir." Jordan's face wore a satisfied grin. "I'll tip off the boys, and I guess we'll make somethin' out o' that bird yet."

Jerry nodded and strolled over to join the group of idle officers on the bench who were gazing at the various ships droning above the airdrome, occasionally making some sardonic comment as a cadet or a careless pilot landed in a series of graceful leaps and bounds. Spiraling down directly above them was the little S. E. 5, its flat, straight wires singing the peculiar high-pitched song that is the individual possession of that type of single-seater.

In a moment it landed and came taxiing toward the blocks. The colonel jumped out, his face mirroring complete satisfaction.

"That wasn't much of a landing for you shavetails to make, but it was —— good for a colonel!" he shouted, and the group of flyers joined in his mirth.

The flying ability of the high-rankers as compared with the boyish lieutenants has always been a matter of hilarity in the Air Service. The colonel really could fly, and hence was willing to "kid the troops," as he expressed it.

In the office, as he was removing his coveralls, he glanced keenly at his new Flight Commander.

"How's your new man Samansky getting on?" he inquired.

"Not so good up to now," answered Jerry honestly. "But Jordan and I can cure him. The bigger they come the harder they fall," he added with a boyish grin.

"Well, see what you can do with him."

And the colonel adjusted his cap, lighted a cigaret and made for his car, there to tarry away fifteen minutes of his valuable time for the pure love of living over his recent flight as he told about it to whomever might stroll up to say how-do-you-do. For the colonel never tired of one topic, when it was flying, which was one of the reasons probably why he had his job.

THE next afternoon came a letter from Jimmy Jennings, down at McMullen—a letter full of exuberant congratulation at Jerry's new assignment. Already the news of the new Headquarters Flight Commander had been whispered along the border, and Jimmy waxed profanely affectionate as he admonished Jerry to "eat 'em up, treat 'em rough and fly their heads off."

"And the next time the *Bluebird* heaves in sight down here we'll get out the band, sprinkle the lawn and sing 'The Star Spangled Banner,' " he ended up. "The colonel may think it's for him, but we'll New York him and hand the bouquet of cactus, which is our only flower down here, to his chauffeur. Give my regards to Natalie, and tell her not to get too puffed up over your rise in the world, and to write once in a while to an ordinary guy."

Jerry grinned at the characteristic outbursts of the devil-may-care Jimmy. They had been cadets together when they received their final training at Issouden, and thenceforward had been squadron mates in the Twenty-second. Jimmy's assignment to border patrol, with his flight stationed at McMullen, had been their first separation for almost three years.

That last sentence reminded him that a certain tanned, clear-eyed young beauty from Barron Ranch was going to be in town in a couple of days, too. He must write her and get a date for——

A sudden uproar, with husky voices raised in wrath, came from behind the hangar. He could distinguish Samansky's guttural, rage-thickened voice, and at Sergeant Jordan's heels he bolted out of the rear door and around the hangar.

Samansky, his evil face bruised and bloody, was just rising from the ground, whereon he had evidently been forcibly propelled by the brawny fist of a mechanic who stood above him threateningly, arm drawn back and face convulsed with wrath.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Jerry, brushing the little knot of men aside.

Proctor, the mechanic, dropped his hands to his sides and saluted respectfully.

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"Sergeant Jordan told me to order Samansky to go to the warehouse and carry back some tires, sir. When I told him he called me a —— and I knocked him down."

"That's right, sir," spoke up another mechanic; and two or three more corroborated Proctor's statement.

"All of you leave and go back to your work, except Sergeant Jordan," commanded Jerry crisply, and the little knot of men faded away obediently.

Then he turned on the blood-smeared man before him with blazing eyes. For several minutes he gave him a tongue-lashing that was the fruit of his fear and his determination.

"And, by —— we won't put you in the guard-house—we'll work you till you can't stand up, and you'd give your last nickel for five minutes' rest," he finished. "Do you hear that, Jordan? If necessary, assign a man to see that Samansky doesn't get a minute's let-up.

"Furthermore, Samansky, you are no longer to do a mechanic's work on this flight. Therefore you do not need to be on flying status, and I shall therefore recommend that you do not receive the fifty per cent. increase in pay for flying-duty any longer."

Next morning Jerry entered the office to find Sergeant Jordan waiting for him.

"Have you carried out my orders in regard to Samansky, Jordan?"

"I'll say I have! He's swept this hangar and carried ice to the water-cooler, and now he's usin' a hoe so like —— that half the left lawn here'll be weeded by noon. I've got something to show you, sir."

Jordan's tone changed with the last sentence, and Jerry looked at him keenly. He held up two pieces of the thin safety-wire used to wire turnbuckles on airplanes, to prevent their turning and thus unscrewing themselves from the landing and flying wires, which they hold in place.

"As you know, lieutenant, we coil this wire around the cables, run it down and through the little hole in the turnbuckle, and then coil it again around the other cable. This safety-wire was filed off right at the place where it enters the turnbuckle hole on the turnbuckle which holds the aileron wires together, on the colonel's S. E. 5. It was filed on both ends of the hole, which means it wasn't no accident."

Jerry whistled softly, and his eyes met Jordan's.

"And the colonel is especially careful about safety-wires. When he gets an idea that he wants to inspect his ships before going up, they're the first things he looks at," resumed Jordan quietly. "With the coils and the whole wire left on, like it was, and filed just where it goes in the hole, it was just an accident that we caught it like we did."

"And providing the turnbuckle hadn't worked off, which it probably wouldn't, the colonel would have eventually found it; and then where would you and I have been; eh, Jordan?"

"Busted!" was the laconic answer.

"The guy that did that was out after either you or me, lieutenant, and not the colonel. Chances are that turnbuckle wouldn't have worked itself off. And the snake that did it——"

There was no need to mention names.

"Inspect every ship from top to bottom," ordered Jerry. "Assign the men, one a night, to sleep in the hangar. Keep Samansky under surveillance every time he gets within ten feet of a ship. And when we get him, it'll be twenty years in Leavenworth or I'm a liar!"

But Samansky was too wise to run his neck into the noose. As he worked like mad on every menial task that needed doing around the flight, he overheard the talk of the mechanics and caught the black looks thrown in his direction. And always as he whipped on his tired muscles he nursed the vicious hatred that was festering in his warped mind.

He cursed that gun-fight with O'Mara's gang in Chicago that had sent him into the Army under an assumed name, to work for the pitiful pittance that the Army paid. And above all he cursed the officer that had taken even that away for three months, then his flying-pay, and given him the back-breaking work of a day-laborer instead of the easy task of a mechanic. So through the sweating hours he lashed himself into a flaming, murderous beast, with cunning enough to bide his time.

THE vast, level field shimmered with dancing heat-waves under the shriveling rays of the early afternoon sun. Here and there along the line of hangars ships were warming up, while high against

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the blue of the sky tiny specks showed the location of others who had carried their pilots far above the withering heat below. In the southwest misty cloud-banks lay sullenly, like slumbering monsters waiting to blot out the flood of sunlight that was bathing Donovan Field in blinding radiance.

Jerry lounged sleepily within the hangar, his long legs elevated above his head and his chair placed to catch what little breeze might wander through the wide-flung doors. His thoughts were somewhat hazy, but pleasant withal, for Natalie was in town and a long evening with her was in prospect.

A perniciously persistent fly evaded four efforts to bring about its demise, returning blithely after each attempted assassination to buzz wildly around the recumbent aviator.

"No rest for the weary!" commented Jerry resignedly, and uncoiled himself lazily.

He strolled out of the office and gazed contentedly at the polished, gleaming travelers of the air which the air force daily groomed and petted as a horseman does his race-track champions. His scrutiny was interrupted by the peremptory summons of the telephone.

"Department Flight, Lieutenant Carter talking."

"Colonel Feldmore, Carter," came the chief's voice over the wire. "You will be ready to leave for McMullen in forty-five minutes, carrying Major Sutton of the Medical Corps."

Jerry's "Very well, sir," gave no hint of the mental cursing in which he was indulging. That date with the girl from Barron Ranch was all shot now.

"JENNINGS had a landing-gear come off on the take-off down there, and when he landed on the airdrome he injured himself very badly. There isn't a doctor there capable of operating—the flight surgeon is at Marfa taking care of Whalen—and an operation is the only chance he has for life. If you can get Sutton there quick enough it may save him. Do your ——est, son!"

Jerry hung up dazedly. Jimmy Jennings, fighting for life down on the border! Somehow it didn't seem possible that the joyous, daredevil young flyer could possibly be lying down there, mangled and torn by one of the ships he loved so well. Gulping down the lump that would rise in his throat, Jerry dashed out into the hangar, his mind working like lightning.

McMullen, one of the small airdromes which dot the length of the Mexican border, was two hundred and fifty miles from Donovan Field. Except for fifty miles on each end of the trip, the direct air-line lay over unbroken mesquite wilderness, without house, field or human being.

Should he take the De Haviland or the Le Père, with its greater speed but somewhat erratic vacuum feed-system? A forced landing would cost the life of Jimmy, certainly—and probably the lives of the men in the ship. And yet haste was imperative, and the Le Père would make the trip in thirty minutes' less time than the *Bluebird*.

And then the prevailing wind, blowing as always from the Gulf of Mexico, would be against them on the trip down. It always took a half-hour longer to fly from Donovan to McMullen than it did from McMullen to Donovan—it meant a two-hour flight even with the Le Père.

"Jordan!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Get the Le Père out and warm it up. It leaves for McMullen in thirty minutes. And shake it up, Jordan, as you never did before! It's carrying a doctor down to Jimmy Jennings—he cracked up half an hour ago!"

Jordan, of the old Twenty-second, needed no further stimulation. With blasphemous emphasis he spurred on the mechanics. In a trice the little two-wheeled dolly was under the massive tail of the big black-and-white ship, and at a half-run it rolled out of the hangar and on the line

The sergeant's eye fell on Samansky, pushing a lawnmower just outside the door.

"Here, Sourface, get on a wing and push!" he yelled, and Samansky thankfully dropped the handle of his lawnmower and leaped to obey.

In his mad effort for speed Jordan forgot his suspicion of Samansky—if he had thought of it he would have dismissed immediately the thought of Samansky's having any opportunity for harm, for all the men were around the ship and in five minutes it would be gone.

By the time the bearded Major Sutton arrived in the colonel's big khaki-colored car the great twelve-cylinder Liberty motor was roaring and the ship straining at the

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blocks which held it. Jordan, his hair whipping in the wind, was in the cockpit, slowly creeping the throttle forward as he watched the instruments with an expert eye.

Three men were holding each wing, and nobody noticed that the man sitting on the tail, huddled over in the miniature cyclone generated by the whirling propeller, was Samansky. He had leaped to that position when the engine started. Every man was busy, and in the swirling dust-cloud no one noticed that the foreigner was slowly moving his hand back and forth over the cable-control wires leading from the joystick to the elevators—the moving control surfaces which control the diving and climbing of a ship in the air.

Hidden in the squat Samansky's hand was a small file. With his hidden face flaming in triumphant hatred he filed those all-important twisted cable-wires until only a frail strand held each of them together.

He carefully replaced the file in a pocket of his overalls as Jordan inched the throttle back, gradually slowing the motor. His sinister eyes were gleaming wells of evil. When the first of those wires broke, which would be when the first sudden strain was put on them, the rest would snap like twine, and Carter would have no control over the fore-and-aft stability of his ship. The weight of the ponderous motor would put the ship in a dive, which would speedily become vertical and end only when the two tons of wood and metal buried itself and its passengers in the ground. And in the frenzied effort to get off, no one would inspect the ship, and he was safe from detection.

Jordan jumped out of the cockpit, leaving the motor idling, as Jerry and Major Sutton hurried out of the hangar, their goggles pushed up on their foreheads. The medical man carried an instrument-case, which two of the crewmen swiftly wired to the side of the fuselage.

"Everything O. K. sir," reported the sergeant. "The oil-pressure is a little high—thirty-eight—but it'll go down when the motor gets warmer. She's turning seventeen hundred on the ground."

"Good," grunted Jerry.

He climbed to the rear seat, ostensibly to make sure that the major was securely strapped in.

"Jennings is a pal of mine, major," he stated quietly as he inspected the belt-fastening. "I'd like to take the air-line over the mesquite to save time instead of following the railroad around. Of course it's taking a chance——"

It was a question, and the major met it like a man.

"I'm as anxious to save Jennings' life as you are, if I can; and time is everything," he said simply.

"Thank you, sir."

Jerry climbed into the front cockpit, glancing speculatively at the clouds banked darkly in the southwest, where their course led. He fastened his belt, rapidly tested each switch and glanced back at Major Sutton, who waved his hand to indicate that he was ready.

"Take away the blocks."

A quick look around to make sure there were no ships landing or taking off near them, and then the suddenly roaring motor was carrying them swiftly over the level field. Fifty yards, and the ground began to sink beneath them, fading slowly as the propeller bit the air and carried the massive Le Père like a bullet in flight. Time was too precious to waste getting altitude over the field.

Jerry pointed the ship on the course to McMullen and throttled the motor to fifteen hundred revolutions per minute—the highest speed at which he dared run it on the two-hour trip. He scanned his instruments intently. Oil-pressure thirty-two pounds—voltmeter charging two—air-pressure three pounds—temperature 85 degrees Centigrade—air-speed meter showing ninety-eight miles an hour—everything was as it should be, and he silently blessed the faithful Jordan and his mechanics.

He was slightly off his calculated course, he noted as he glanced at his floating compass, but a little right rudder corrected that; and he settled back in the cockpit for the long grind to the Rio Grande. And as he thought of Jimmy at the end of the run he found himself straining forward as if he could help lift the throbbing ship on its way.

Twenty-five minutes, and they had passed the last of the little towns that snuggled close to the railroad as if for protection from the great barren stretches beyond. The ragged edge of the mesquite was already visible, and the ship's course was branching off from the roundabout route taken by the single-track railroad.

The rim of the mesquite slipped behind them. For a hundred and fifty miles there

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would be nothing but a sea of mesquite as far as the eye could see—not a possible landing-field, no water, no human being to succor them should the pulsing motor fail.

Jerry was watching his motor like a hawk to detect any signs of weakness, repeatedly ducking his head inside the cowl the better to listen for a miss. Always there came to him the sweetest song known to a flyer's ears—the drumming roar that told of twelve mighty cylinders firing in tune.

They were flying at two thousand feet now—the lowest altitude at which the motor would stay cool. Climbing higher would mean wasting speed. And perhaps, thought Jerry with a queer sinking sensation, a few moments might measure the difference between life and death for his devil-may-care pal hovering on the border-line.

An hour, and they were fairly over the bleak, rolling mesquite, flying just beneath the darkening clouds, of which he had been subconsciously aware from the take-off. He breathed a prayer to the patron saint of flyers that they might hold no rain.

Holding up his hand to shield his goggles, he leaned from behind the windshield to look ahead. The wind-blast, compounded of their speed and the propeller wash, struck him like a blow from a solid substance. That mist ahead might be only mist, or it might be rain.

Suddenly it seemed to solidify, and he cursed fervently. It was rain! He hesitated briefly, measuring the extent of the storm, and then with a reassuring smile back at Major Sutton he kept on his course. It might be miles, and that meant precious minutes, before he could skirt the storm. Like a thunderbolt the ship drove into the heart of the rain.

The ground was completely out of sight. The rain stung his face like sharpened pellets from a blow-gun. His goggles were clouded, although he crouched as low as possible behind the befogged windshield. His instruments were all that he had to fly by now, and as he hunched down closer behind the shielding cowl he kept his eyes glued to the vibrating needles before him. His speedometer was holding even at ninety-eight, which meant that he was flying level, neither climbing nor diving.

Pushing his head up for a moment, he could feel no wind on either cheek, so he was not sideslipping or skidding sidewise through the air. The motor roared along evenly. What Jerry dreaded most of all was that water might penetrate the spark-plug fittings, causing a short circuit, but straining ears could catch no miss.

SUDDENLY they burst forth into sunlight again, but for only a moment. They had but passed through the advance guard of the storm; ahead of them stretched a blank wall of driving rain. The frowning clouds were piled high—fifteen thousand feet was Jerry's quick estimate—and the range of the storm was from horizon to horizon. A few seconds, and the gallant ship was swallowed once more in blinding mist and stinging raindrops.

For endless eons of time he flew as a sightless man walks, tense and strained to the breaking-point as he watched his instruments. Twice his air-speed dropped to sixty and his ship almost stalled. He pushed the stick ahead, judging when he was level solely by the registering of the air-speed meter. Sometimes it jumped to one hundred and fifty or sixty, and then he pulled up.

With nothing visible but mist and rain, he had nothing but his flyer's instinct and his instruments to guide him. He strove to keep his compass course, but time and time again he found himself a few degrees off. His face was raw and smarting, stung almost beyond endurance by the force of the rain, which was increasing in violence all the time.

Suddenly the Le Père careened wildly, and a blinding bolt of lightning flashed down just ahead in a jagged streak. The thunderclap crashed above the deafening drone of the motor. Head down and useless goggles raised, the young flyer silently, grimly fought the vicious air-currents, whirling toward the vortex of the storm, that strove to suck him down, and failing, threw his plane about like the flimsiest leaf.

The electricity in the storm made his compass useless, but with rudder locked he fought to keep the Le Père ever driving toward its goal. He forgot his passenger, forgot even Jimmy Jennings. All he knew was to carry on.

Occasionally the motor missed when an overwhelming current uptilted the plane, but always the mighty Liberty cut in again when the ship came level. The altimeter showed only eight hundred feet now, for even the Le Père could not fight the sucking

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currents which resistlessly pulled it down.

With a grim smile Jerry reflected that it didn't make much difference whether he could see the ground or not. One place was as good as another down there, which meant no good at all. If the motor should go bad——

A flashing streak—a tremendous clap of thunder that seemed to rock the very universe, and a last wrenching jolt shook the ship. The mist began to lighten ahead. Jerry was too much interested in the prospect of a cessation of the storm to notice that the ship, which had been pointed up by that last bump, settled back to level very slowly, although he had automatically pushed forward on the stick.

For the next minute the rain decreased slowly in violence, until finally they hurtled into smiling sunlight, blue sky and cottony billows of cloud that floated lazily above them. Seventy-five miles from McMullen, and Shadow Lake over there to the east showed that they were less than twenty miles west of their course!

Jerry turned back to look at Major Sutton. That gentleman, although he had no conception that the storm had been anything but an uncomfortable experience, looked as if he had been dragged through a knot-hole. His face was covered with minute red specks, like a rash. He managed a rueful smile and shook his head as he glanced back at the black clouds which were rapidly receding in the distance.

As for Jerry, his heart was light. Somehow he had a hunch that Jimmy Jennings would have to live after that fight with the elements in his behalf.

He turned back to his job, noting that they were only a thousand feet high. He pulled back a little on the stick. They must get at least two thousand feet for the sake of the sturdy motor that had carried them so gallantly.

The ship drove along steadily. Again he pulled back on the stick, farther this time, but the ship did not answer. He glanced at the tachometer—fourteen-fifty, plenty of power to make it climb. Again he tried to climb, and then pushed forward, but the Le Père varied its horizontal course not a jot.

With a sudden feeling of utter weakness Jerry looked back at his elevators. There they were, streamlined with the stabilizer by the force of the air-stream.

Then he saw what he had dreaded. The control-wires were whipping loosely in the wind. His ailerons and rudder were all right, but his one indispensable control was gone. Only the extreme tail-heaviness of the Le Père, coupled with the perfect rigging of the flight mechanics, had kept the ship from nose-diving down long before this. And if the motor ever went below fourteen-fifty and the nose started to drop—if even a tiny bump should send them into a dive——

Slowly he pushed the throttle forward. Up to fifteen hundred jumped the tachometer, and the nose gradually drew up. Back crept the throttle, and almost imperceptibly the nose dropped to level again.

Jerry sat in silent, nerve-breaking misery, waiting for the time when inevitably the ship would start its last rushing dive. If by a miracle it kept level, the gas would give out in another hour, and the crash would come then.

Only one explanation was possible—Samansky. And what a revenge! Jennings, Major Sutton, himself! Soon he and the doctor would be nothing but mangled heaps of flesh, and Jimmy would die for the lack of them.

Mechanically flying straight for McMullen, he cursed the stubborn pride that had made him strive to break Samansky despite the reasons he had for disciplining him by court martial. The young pilot writhed in impotent rage as he remembered that Samansky would go free, for there would be no one to tell the tale of the filed elevator-wires.

BY SOME strange freak of psychology this acted as a needed stimulus to Jerry's horror-numbed brain. As McMullen came in sight, twenty miles away, the Rio Grande lying in silver coils beyond, a wild idea flashed into his consciousness. Perhaps if the motor was cut just a trifle and the ship started to dive it would straighten out when the full force of Liberty was turned on! And yet that thousand-pound motor, given a little leeway with the nose down, would almost inevitably force the ship into a vertical dive.

However, it was their only chance. As well meet death now as later, and get the horrible waiting over. He turned a white, set face back toward the major, who, unconscious of peril, was smiling delightedly as he waved toward McMullen.

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For thirty seconds, his hand on the throttle, the boyish pilot fought down the fear within him. He seemed powerless to pull back that little lever the half-inch which probably meant death. With sweat gleaming on his face in icy drops he forced his hand back. To fourteen hundred went the tachometer needle, and the nose sank a few inches, the speedometer jumping to a hundred and ten.

Back went the tachometer to fifteen-fifty, and in dumb agony Jerry waited. A hundred and twenty miles an hour now; would that nose never come up? Then with torturing slowness the ship drew level.

Again the throttle crawled back, to stay a little longer this time. McMullen was only fifteen miles away now, and at a hundred and forty miles an hour the great Le Père hurled itself toward the goal. With bounding hope Jerry shoved the throttle ahead, and a wild shout of triumph, unheard by even his own ears above the motor's roar, burst from his lips as the ship drew level again.

It was a chance for life, albeit a mighty slim one. Could he judge the response of the Le Père so accurately, handle that throttle so perfectly, that he could actually land safely? Speed was their only salvation, and the slightest mistake, even a few inches, at over a hundred miles an hour would be as sure death as the vertical dive. And the McMullen field was so small!

Carefully he measured the distance, and then by throttling slightly went into a gradual dive. Five miles away the hangars bulked, and the Le Père was six hundred feet high. At a hundred feet, one mile from the airdrome, he opened the throttle slowly. Bit by bit it crept up, until it was wide open, and still the Le Père dived on, wires screaming and struts quivering with the terrific speed.

All of the hundreds of hours he had handled ships gave Jerry of their lessons then as he strained forward and forced himself to handle the throttle slowly. He had planned to hit the fence around the edge of the airdrome—if he went over it with such speed he must inevitably crack up against the hangars on the far side.

With a gasp of relief he saw the nose creep up as the fence loomed before them. He did not see the motionless men in front of the hangars, watching him in fear and trembling. Like a flash he cut his switches, just as the great two-ton Le Père broke through the fence as if it had been paper. So great was their speed that the ship did not drop the three feet to the ground, but miraculously settled.

A bounce, and they were rolling over the blessed ground. Jerry saw the hangars ahead and mechanically kicked the rudder, "ground-looped" and escaped the steel walls into which their momentum would have carried them.

THE trip back to Donovan Field next afternoon was uneventful, but the massed white buildings looked mighty good to both passengers and pilot in the Le Père as the ship landed smoothly and taxied to the hangar. Jerry listened to the extravagant praises of Major Sutton for the 'steenth time, asked him again for assurance that Jimmy was out of danger, and then saluted his good-by as Colonel Feldmore's car carried the worthy medico away.

"Got your wire O. K.," the provost marshal was telling him over the phone a minute later. "Samansky deserted yesterday, but we've sent the call all over the country. I just got an answer from Chicago, saying that his description fits 'Blackie' Dawberg, a gun-toting gangster wanted up there for attempted murder. We're bound to get him!"

Jerry hung up, walked slowly into the office and awkwardly typed out his operations report:

> Lt. Gerald Carter, Department Headquarters Flight, assigned special mission to McMullen, Texas, Major W. B. Sutton, passenger, Aug. 22, 1920. Returned Aug. 23, 1920. Flying time 2 hours 15 minutes Aug. 22; 1 hour 55 minutes Aug. 23. Mission successfully completed.

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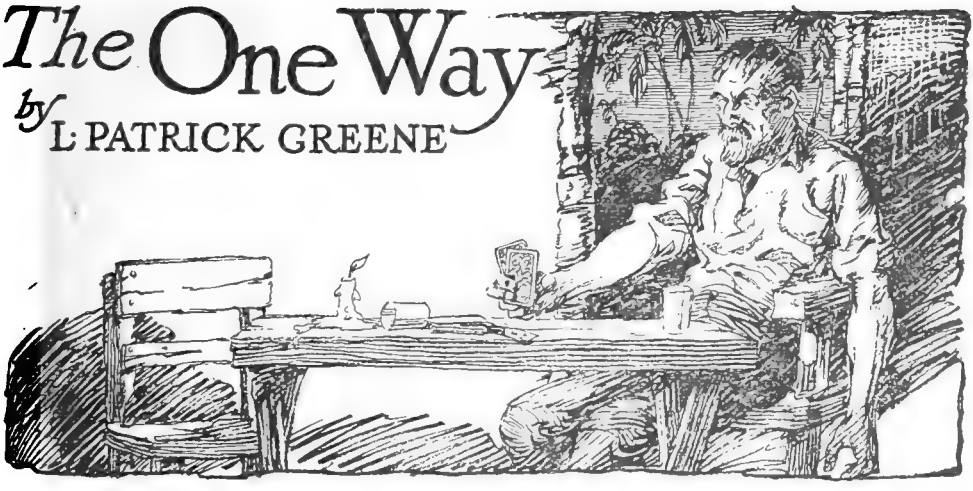
The One Way

by L. PATRICK GREENE



Author of "Two of a Kind," "Thicker than Water," etc.

ONCE in a while—not so frequently as in bygone years, for the deserted spots of the earth are becoming fewer and fewer—one reads of some notable achievement of explorers: the discovery of a new land; the source of a mysterious river; the pacifying and civilizing of a savage tribe. One reads of desert lands made fertile; of marshes drained and made habitable. All of which proclaims the ability of Man to surmount the difficulties of Nature; gives added proof of the ascendency of the white man over the "lesser" peoples of earth.

All of this, to put it in a few words, denotes the white man's ability to "think black," to "see black" and to "touch black" without "becoming black."

Little or nothing is told of the men who, setting out to conquer, have been conquered. Not meaning by this men of poor moral and mental equipment; men who, like driftwood upon the ocean, are scattered hither and yon about the face of the globe; who sink speedily to their proper level among the savage tribes and, in their degradation, become even lower than the people they affect to despise.

There are men, men possessed of high resolve and steady purpose, who, having left the highways of civilization to straighten out the weaving paths in the dark lands, become lost in the maze.

It is so in Africa and doubtless in India, China. Wherever the white man's civilization has but a slender hold the same holds true—that the lure of the lotus, the scent of the poppy, claims its victims among the "dominant race" even as in Africa white men "go black."

After the fierce, implacable rays of the sun burn out all thoughts of higher things, the creeping, mysterious, slimy jungle ways clutch the heart in an unrelaxing grip; then the African moon implants strange fancies and stranger desires in the minds of men.

THE hut reeked of nauseating odors conveying a knowledge of the wickedness and slime of Africa. It was cluttered with shapeless furniture—tables, and a chair rough-hewn from native timber. The untidy mattress on the bunk was stuffed with grass almost fermenting in its decay. Flies, mosquitoes, ticks and all manner of unclean creeping things there found a secure haven; spiders, red, fat and hairy, ran up and down the filthy walls with an incredible speed.

A spluttering candle, distorted into a shapeless mass by the intense heat, stuck in its own grease on the table, was the only light and cast flickering, grotesque shadows. Now and again there was a sharp hiss and the momentary dimming of the light as some luckless insect ventured beyond the margin of safety and was destroyed by the flame, or fell to the table to become ensnared in the dripping grease.

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At either side of the table sat two men—counterparts of the insects.

Two men; two white men, so besmeared by filth that the whiteness of them—body and soul—was stained; ineradicably stained.

The one was short and stout; his eyes, almost hidden by the rolls of fat, blinked piggishly. In his voice was the unmistakable whine of the London gutter-rat.

With a snort of disgust he threw down the cards he held in his hand.

"Hi'm sick o' playin' cards wiv a bloomin' pig like you, 'Lanky.' Hi'm goin' back to the store."

"Don't go yet," the other pleaded.

Lanky was tall; his frame was gaunt, yet it gave evidence of a bygone strength. His eyes were dull and expressionless; it was as if a film shaded them. His hair was long and matted; his beard stained with tobacco-juice. The strong curve of his chin was belied by a weak, drooling mouth from which hung particles of food.

"Don't go yet," he repeated.

He chose his words with care as one speaking an unfamiliar language. Yet the voice was that of a cultured man, and there was more than a hint of the Cambridge drawl in the laboriously formed words.

"You must give me my revenge, you know. You've cleaned me out," he added.

The other rose with a snarl.

"W'y should Hi? You've got nothin' left to play fer hif Hi cleaned yer hout."

The other sighed and drummed with long, graceful fingers on the table.

"All right," he said dully.

Then, remembering his duties as host—

"Won't you have a drink before you go, Jenkins?"

He clapped his hands, and a young native girl entered, bearing a calabash of beer. She placed it on the table and swiftly withdrew.

Jenkins' eyes filled with a bestial light as he went to the door of the hut and watched the maiden's progress along the winding path which led to the native village.

"Hi'll tell yer wot Hi will do fer yer," he said, turning on the other suddenly. "Hi will lay hall my winnings against the girl."

"No. I couldn't do that. She's all I've got in the world and—though perhaps you wouldn't believe it—she's rather fond of me."

Jenkins pondered a moment.

"Wot hif Hi add 'arf a case o' whisky, Lanky?"

Lanky's eyes gleamed with desire.

"Make it a whole case and I'll play."

"You're hon. Wot shall us play—cribbage, Nap or poker?"

"Let's cut."

With clumsy, trembling hands he shuffled and arranged the cards.

"Ace counts high," he said, "and high wins."

"You've said it. Go on. You cut first."

"Queen of clubs," said Lanky, triumphantly showing his card. "You've got to cut high to beat that."

"That's heasy," the other boasted as he slowly cut the cards; but before he showed his cut he substituted a card he had previously palmed. It was clumsily done, and a more mentally alert man would not have been deceived.

"The hace of 'earts," he exclaimed triumphantly. "That's wot Hi calls a 'eart win. Cheer up, Lanky," he added, seeing the other's look of despair. "Hi'll send yer down a bottle o' whisky has a present. Hi'll be down in the morning fer the girl."

He passed out of the hut into the brilliant light of the African moon. It was in the season of rains, and the air was filled with a fresh, moist, earthy scent. The path to his store, a mile or more away, was beset with creeping vines, from which hung, diamond-like, glistening drops of water. They sprinkled him as, wallowing in his gait like a pig, he thrust the vines out of his path.

LEFT alone, the man called Lanky slumped heavily in his chair and idly toyed with the discarded cards which littered the table.

Suddenly with an exclamation of rage he sprang to his feet. He held two cards in his hands. One had been Jenkins' cut, and the other he had picked up from the cards on the table. Both were the ace of hearts.

"The swine cheated me," he said wrathfully. "He has been cheating me all night; always when we have played he has cheated. Now he has taken everything of mine—even the girl."

Lanky had reverted to the native. An injury had been dealt him that only blood could wipe out.

From the wall he took down a knob-kerrie—it was one he had made many years

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previously, and, proud of his achievement, he had carved his initials on the shaft—and a revolver.

He considered them both carefully.

"The knobkerrie would be best," he muttered. "It is not a white man's weapon and if there be any talk the deed will be charged to the black ones. It is well known that the dog deals hardly with the natives who work for him."

He rose, knobkerrie in hand, and went to the door of his hut. As he watched, a strong wind suddenly sprang up; the sky became overclouded; the moon was suddenly blotted out.

A vivid flash of lightning broke through the darkness, followed by a heavy peal of thunder, and then came the rain—the pelting, tropical rain.

Lanky stood for a moment watching the storm, a grim smile of satisfaction hovering about his lips; then, drawing his tattered coat closely about him, he hastened along the path leading to Jenkins' store.

When he returned half an hour later, wet to the skin and shivering violently, he threw himself down on the bed and slept—a heavy, sodden sleep.

Once he awoke, lighted a candle and examined the knobkerrie.

There was a dark stain on it and two or three matted tufts of hair.

Opening a heavy iron-bound chest, he put the knobkerrie inside, closed the lid, locked it and returned to bed

When he awoke the following morning it was to the delirium of fever.

THREE days elapsed before the fever left him; he was weak and helpless as a child.

"The white policeman from the fort is here, *baas*," announced the native girl in the vernacular.

He started at a sudden recollection.

"How long has he been here?"

"Four days, *baas*."

"Have I been in fever all that time?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Why comes the white man here?"

"The little pig man at the store is dead. The policeman came to find who killed him."

"So? The storekeeper is dead, you say?"

"Aye. He was killed the day after you became sick."

"The day after?"

He looked at her searchingly.

"Without doubt, my lord."

He gave a sigh of relief. If the woman knew anything she was loyal; had already established an alibi for him in the remote event of one being needed.

"The white policeman goes back to the fort today," the girl continued. "He waits only to see you. He gave me medicine to cure your fever. He is young," she added, "and many things are hidden from him."

"It is well. Bid him enter."

She left the hut, and shortly after a young sergeant of the Rhodesian Mounted entered.

He looked at the man called Lanky, making no effort to conceal the disgust he felt.

"Are you better?" he asked curtly. "Feel all right now?"

"Yes. I'm all right. My woman tells me that Jenkins is dead."

The sergeant nodded.

"Killed. Head bashed in by a knobkerrie. A native reported the killing the day before yesterday."

Lanky chuckled.

"I always warned Jenkins he'd come to a sudden end if he didn't stop ill-treating his niggers. Well, I'm not sorry. He was a —— cur." The last with a sudden flash of anger.

The sergeant looked at him curiously.

"Had no love for him, did you? *You* didn't kill him by any chance?"

Lanky laughed.

"Not unless I did it when I was delirious."

"No. Of course you didn't," mused the trooper. "It was a nigger all right, but a fat chance I've got of finding him. With the rain washing out all the spoor it's an impossible task."

He stopped then with a show of embarrassment.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he blurted out. "I hate like —— to see a white man in a mess like this; and you—you speak as though——"

"The only thing you can do," said the other with a snarl, "is to get out of here. Since when have the police turned missionaries?"

The voice changed of a sudden to a pleading whine.

"Give me ten shillings so that I can buy some whisky. That's all you can do; and—whisky helps one—to—forget—things."

The sergeant took a handful of money

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from his pocket, and, selecting a gold-piece, held it out toward Lanky.

He clutched at it greedily, but the coin dropped from his nerveless hand and rolled under the big chest.

"Get it," he cried. "Get it before the woman comes. She'll take it from me."

The sergeant went down on his hands and knees and tried to reach the coin.

"I'll have to move the chest," he said. "It's gone under too far."

He tugged at the iron-bound handles, and to his surprize and the consternation of Lanky the apparently massive chest collapsed like a burst bubble, scattering its contents about the floor. White ants, one of the curses of Africa, had during the days of Lanky's sickness attacked the trunk, reducing the solid oak to rottenness.

The sergeant's first impulse was to laugh; but the laugh froze on his lips as he followed the other's frightened gaze to a knobkerrie which lay in the center of the hut.

He picked it up wonderingly. There was a dark stain on the knob of it, and several matted tufts of hair stuck to it.

"So it was you," he said slowly.

Lanky shrank back.

"What do you mean?"

"You killed Jenkins, and with this."

The sergeant held out the knobkerrie. Lanky sneered.

"Is that your evidence? You forget that I was in bed with fever; I've got a witness to prove that. As for that stain, I killed a dog with the knobkerrie; that accounts for it."

"That may well be," said the sergeant slowly; "but it'll do no harm to take you and the woman to the resident magistrate. We'll see what Simpson has to say."

Lanky's face blenched.

"You don't mean Bob Simpson—'Matabele' Simpson?"

"Yes. What of it?"

Lanky slid from his chair and crawled on his knees toward the sergeant, hands uplifted in supplication.

"You can't take me before him. You mustn't. I ——"

"Why not?"

"I'm his brother. I'm John Simpson. See, here's proof."

Feverishly he rummaged among the scattered contents of the box and handed several begrimed documents to the sergeant, who perused them in silence.

"An A. B.," he said at length. "Honor man at Cambridge; a commissioned officer; awarded the D. S. O.; and now—a 'white Kafir.'"

There was unmeasured contempt in his voice.

"You were reported dead; a memorial service was held in honor of 'an explorer and a gentleman.' And all this time you've been living here in filth!"

The man called John Simpson giggled fatuously.

"I fooled them all, didn't I?"

"And to think a thing like you is Mary's father! Why, the knowledge of it would kill her with shame."

Simpson picked on the name.

"Mary? I had a daughter named Mary. What do you know of her?"

"I'm going to marry her when I get my commission. She's staying with her uncle."

AGAIN Simpson giggled.

"Then you see how impossible it 'ud be for you to take me in, don't you?"

"You wouldn't make yourself known?"

"Wouldn't I?"

"Think of the misery it would cause. Have you no pride left?"

"What do I care? You take me in and I'll appeal to my daughter for help. The blame will be yours."

"There's no doubt in my mind," said the sergeant slowly, "that you killed Jenkins."

"Oh, I killed him all right, but you're going to have a hard job to prove it. Besides—if I go before the commissioner, I go as John Simpson."

He laughed maliciously as he noted the look of indecision on the sergeant's face.

The sergeant took down the revolver which hung on the wall. It was loaded.

"There's one way out," he said, and handed the revolver to Simpson. "I'm going now to tell the woman to get ready for the trip to the fort. I shall return in ten minutes with a litter for you."

Simpson took the revolver with shaking fingers.

"What do you mean?"

The sergeant, making no reply, turned to leave.

"I can't do it," gasped Simpson, then fell in a huddled heap to the floor.

The sergeant knelt besides him and felt his heart.

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"Only fainted," he muttered, and noted that Simpson still held the revolver in his grip.

A vision came to him of the resident magistrate, grown white in the service of his country, honored among all men; of Mary, clear-eyed, sweet and gracious.

The vision vanished.

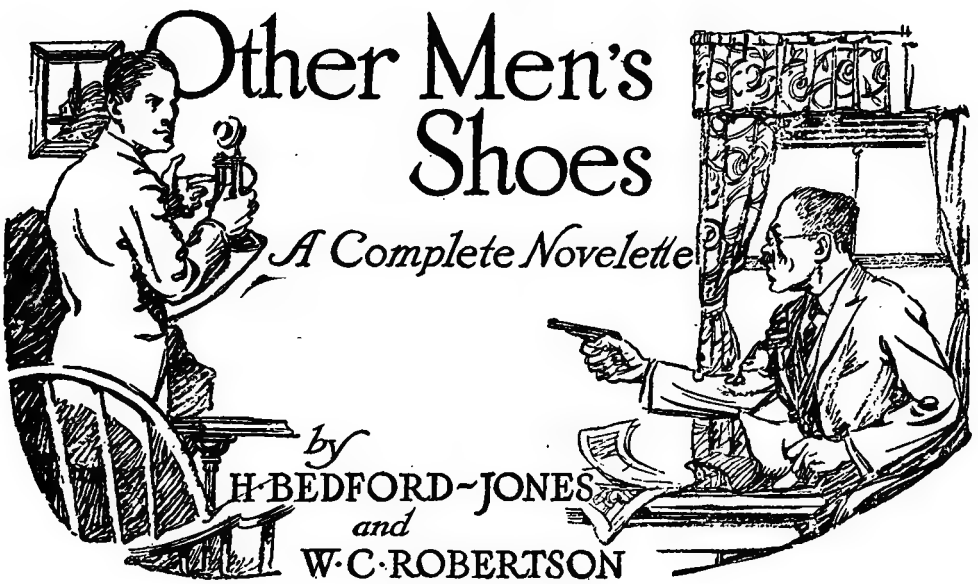
In its place was the ugly reality of the present. The dirty, vermin-infested hut; the ruin of a man prostrate at his feet.

Stooping quickly, he took the unconscious man's hand, the hand which gripped the revolver, and brought it up slowly until the muzzle touched his temple.

Simpson stirred fitfully at the cold touch of the steel.

A report broke the deadly silence.

The sergeant strode quickly out of the hut into the cleanness, gladness and light of the sun.



Other Men's Shoes

A Complete Novelette

by

H·BEDFORD-JONES

and

W·C·ROBERTSON

Authors of "The Messenger."

CHAPTER I

NOBODY OF NOWHERE

THE street was dark, empty of all human life, absolutely deserted, and the air was clammy with San Francisco's night-fog. Yet my first memory was of hearing the echoing click of a footstep behind me. It was not my own step. I wore rubber heels and this was a faint but distinct heel-tap.

The fact that I wore rubber heels was the only thing I knew about myself.

Coming to a corner, I paused, and identified my location with surprize and bewilderment. I must have come down California Street, over the hill from the Fairmont and from Chinatown. Before me were the cable-car barns, their faintly lighted clock-hands pointing to eleven forty-five. I was, obviously, in San Francisco; I recognized the vicinity immediately. But who was I? What was I doing here at this time of night?

On these points my mind was blank. I had wakened to the fact that I knew nothing, was nobody. Oddly enough, it did not terrify me. Oddly enough, too, my mind was perfectly clear and coherent—realizing where I stood, for example—while it was unable to tell me anything about myself. My faculties, in all other respects, were amazingly acute.

You have read stories of what is incorrectly termed aphasia or amnesia. Well, it had me! I comprehended the fact, and laughed in a silly way. Whither was I bound, and why? I felt dimly surprized at myself for being in San Francisco, yet my identity was completely gone.

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As I stood, motionless, the fantom footstep came again. I glanced about. The street still appeared empty.

It was a neighborhood of apartment houses and family hotels. If any one were following me, he might easily have ducked into a doorway. I laughed again, found a packet of cigarets in my coat pocket, and mechanically lighted one. Then I flung it away, suddenly conscious that I detested cigarets.

This action made me aware that there was something radically amiss with my physical self.

"I'd better take advantage of this corner light," I thought, "and find out where I live, at least. Suffering cats—have I been run through a sawmill?"

Pain surged up as I moved. I seemed well-dressed, but——

My hand went to my head; and, under a heavy traveling-cap, shrank from a large bump wet with a touch of blood. My right overcoat sleeve was badly torn, the arm and hand unhurt. My left forearm, on the contrary, was slightly ripped as if by a knife-slash. It hurt. Not with the nervous pain that eats at the soul, but with the vigorous spurring of torn skin which invigorates a man. It was an unimportant scratch. I felt rather sore all over, as if good solid fists had been lately landing upon me.

"Head stove in; that explains the loss of identity," I reflected. "Now to make interior explanations and get my name. Tailored clothes? Congratulations!"

Thrusting my hand into my left overcoat pocket I found there a mass of small, hard objects, which I did not investigate. In the other pockets, cigarets and matches. I then looked at the inside breast pocket of the overcoat, and sustained two distinct shocks.

Number one came from the finding of a large and hefty automatic, smelling evilly of very recent use. The second shock came from the tailor's label, which alleged that I was Pedro Alicante of New Orleans. At this, I'm afraid that I swore.

"A dago! Am I a dago? It's impossible! I don't know why I reject the allegation and the alligator, but I do. Pete Alicante? Not yet, brother! Look again."

I proceeded with the man-hunt. My suit proved to be of light, silky stuff and yielded new surprizes. The tailor's label bore the name of a firm in Nanking Road, Shanghai, but gave up no owner's name. In one pocket was a torn purser's receipt yielding only the name of a ship, *Siam Maru*. In another pocket was a very English-made pistol, light but deadly. It had, like the first weapon, been fired recently. The sum total of all this was that I had come from Shanghai.

Waistcoat. Empty, save for a card on which were embossed half a dozen Chinese ideographs, which meant nothing to me. Trousers. A roll of fifty-dollar bills—a big roll; two silk handkerchiefs, without mark or monogram; some loose coins; a silver pen-knife, unmarked; a plain, cheap leather bill-fold in which was enclosed only a slip of red paper bearing a long string of Chinese writing. No watch. Nothing else.

"Going from bad to worse," I observed. "First a dago, and now a Chink laundryman! But no, I can't admit the latter hypothesis at all. White skin, mustache, blond hair. I imagine that puts a quietus on the yellow peril! A good roll, and what feels like silk underwear. I should worry! Now, if only I knew where I lived——"

AT THIS instant I once more became aware of that footstep—solid reality this time. It came from directly behind me, and was accompanied by a stifled oath. I turned, and looked into the mouth of a big revolver which was cocked and ready for business. Behind the gun was a large individual. His back was to the street-light, so that I was fully illuminated and he was shadowed—a paradoxical reversal of our mental states. I lifted my hands silently and quickly.

"That's right," said my accoster roughly. "Curse it! If it wasn't for that loose heel-plate I'd ha' got you two blocks back."

From what I could see of him, he was a tough customer, a typical thug. Something in his nervous, jerky manner, in the gleam of his eyes, gave me the idea that he was a hop-head.

"Is this a hold-up?" I asked. He flung a sneer at me.

"Aw, you know what it is! I seen the whole works. I been on your trail from Grant Avenue, and I seen you run down that guy and get what you wanted. Bo, I will say you're one swift guy, but don't start nothin' with me, I warn you! Hand 'em over, now."

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"Eh? Hand what over?" I inquired.

A vicious snarl came from the man.

"You fool, d'you want me to croak you to get 'em?"

He meant business, and he meant to waste no time. I was ignorant as to what he so strongly desired, unless it were my roll. Having been separated from my identity, I did not intend to be separated from my meal-ticket, however. So, keeping my hands in the air, I glanced away from him toward the opposite side of the street. My eyes suddenly widened.

"Hi, officer!" I broke out. "Over here, quick!"

The thug shot one sidewise glance and I had him. The old ruse always works.

I can not assume any great credit for the affair. What happened was almost involuntary. You know how the ape fights—the ape, perhaps the most brainless and swiftest creature in the animal kingdom! You know how his brain and muscles coordinate with a nearly impossible rapidity; how the eye can not follow his movements; how his brute savagery rends and kills as if by some lightning-driven machine.

Thus it was with me. I must have learned my methods in some rough school, for as I caught the revolver in one hand, I drove up a knee and smashed it home. The footpad staggered and my right took him squarely in the Adam's apple. That was a cruel blow, delivered as an ape or a child strikes, with the heel of the palm. The revolver came free in my left hand, unfired. I lashed down with it, and the front sight spiked across the man's face.

He emitted a gasping cry, broke loose, and went away at a shambling run, crying out incoherently. The poor fellow had enough, I judged.

"This would seem to be my night for collecting firearms," was my thought. "Since there is no use toting an armament around, I'd better unload."

Carefully releasing the still cocked hammer of the revolver, I deposited it in the refuse-can on the curb, together with the large automatic from my overcoat. A little farther on, a lighted doorway disclosed a family hotel, and before I stopped to think, I was headed for it.

Inside, a sleepy night clerk received me.

"Well, we have a few rooms for transients," he said to my inquiry. "Got any baggage?"

"The best in the world," I responded cheerfully, and tendered one of the fifty-dollar bills from my roll. He agreed that there was nothing to equal this in the way of impedimenta, and shoved out a pen with the request that I register.

I paused. What name? My brain groped for some alias, but drew blank. Cursing myself for an ass, I stabbed down with the pen and inscribed the name of P. Alicante, of New Orleans.

"Put me down for an eight o'clock call and a newspaper," I said.

The clerk nodded assent, blotted my signature, and jotted down the room number. Then he led the way to the elevator.

Five minutes aferward I stood alone in an excellent room. From the bathroom window which opened upon a fire escape I had a view of a dark alley; the front-room window gave upon California Street. Realizing that I was tired and sore, I turned on the hot water in the bathtub and prepared to undress.

Something chinked faintly in my left overcoat pocket, as it was tossed across a chair. I picked it up and investigated. The hard mass of small objects came pouring forth in a glittering stream. I stared at them, utterly astounded. Jewels!

Real jewels, no doubt of it. No diamonds and pearls, understand, but none the less gems; opals, a dozen old rings set with seal-cut stones, unset pebbles by the dozen. Some were precious, for I glimpsed one or two star sapphires; the majority appeared to be of semi-precious varieties. No great fortune was represented, but the mass value must be of respectable dimensions.

I inspected the baubles with hopeless bewilderment. Where had they come from?

"Here's what the crook was after," I thought. "Why was he after them, then, and what had he seen? If he followed me from Grant Avenue, then I must have come from Chinatown. And what the —— was I doing there? How did the crook know I had these stones, and how on earth did I get them?"

To these perfectly natural queries the only answer came in the well-known voice of Dame Echo. It did not satisfy at all.

None the less, I began to be somewhat pleased with my unknown self. I was obviously no piker. I collected silk underwear, jewels, fifty-dollar bills, and dressed well. So I stripped to the buff and made

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another search for marks or names that might identify me.

Except that my shoes and cap were almost new and had been purchased from Lane Crawford in Shanghai, the search was fruitless. As a last resort I examined my body for marks, and found nothing of moment. I concluded that I had come recently from China, via the *Siam Maru*. The card with the embossed ideographs, and the red paper with the string of similar writing, puzzled me. The latter looked fussily important, but was all Greek to me. So I gave up the attempt.

Having bathed luxuriously, I donned my silk underwear again, turned out the lights, and so, as the late Mr. Pepys was wont to observe, to bed. A good night's sleep should restore my lost identity. Yet sleep did not come at once; my situation held me in thought.

I have observed that the unfortunate chaps who lose themselves in stories have a —— of a time worrying about it. This did not apply to me. I felt perfectly cheerful, even eager. The prospect of waking up in my own shoes caused me mild regret. If you were flung into such circumstances, would you really lose any sleep over it? Of course not. You would not care whether the other chap who used to be you were married or single, a gay dog or a prohibitionist. Finding yourself free, white and twenty-odd, with a fat roll in your pocket, would be an absolute lark.

You would probably come to precisely the same conclusion I attained; namely, that you would play the game to the limit and see what life looked like to an outsider. You could, ultimately, count upon science and civilization to restore your old humdrum self again—if you ever wanted it back.

In fact, you'd give a month's salary to get rid of your troubles and just to be another chap entirely for a while. Isn't it true?

CHAPTER II

WANTED—AN ALIBI

I SLEPT like a top and awakened only to the insistent ringing of the telephone. "Eight o'clock, Mr. Alicante."

Responding, I hung up the receiver and yawned.

Who was I? Pedro Alicante of New Orleans and nobody else. I knew instantly all that had taken place the previous night, after that moment when I found myself walking down California Street. Of what had preceded that moment, I knew nothing. Of my real self I was ignorant. Sleep had not altered my mental status.

"Ah!" I exclaimed suddenly. "Newspapers, of course. If I'm reported missing, they will record it. I'd like to read about myself. Besides I seem to be shy a good deal of general information, such as the date and year. Let's take a look."

Opening my room door, I found a *Chronicle* lying outside, and eagerly seized it.

My first thought was for the date, my next for the shipping news. I discovered that it was Tuesday, and the twenty-sixth of October, 1920. Very good! Turning to the shipping news, I found at once that the *Siam Maru* had docked late the previous afternoon, having been delayed by fog. Eagerly I scanned the list of more prominent passengers, wondering if I would recall my own name. Beyond a doubt, I had landed from that boat on the previous day.

No luck! Not a name gave me the least sense of familiarity. The *Siam* had brought several hundred coolies, en route under contract to the sugar plantations in Cuba, and for all I could tell, I might have been one of those coolies.

Finding nothing, I turned back to the front page with the notion of looking through the paper for some account of a missing man with red hair. That idea died a-borning, and I got no farther than the first two columns of the front page. There, under scare-head titles, was an account of one Pedro Alicante which struck me absolutely dumb. Alicante had pulled off what was termed:

TWO MEN SLAIN.
BOLDEST DOWN-TOWN ROBBERY IN YEARS.

I absorbed the account into reeling, staggered senses. Every word impressed more forcibly upon me that this was no nightmare, but actual fact; further, that I was indeed Pedro Alicante, and that I could not be any one else.

At eleven o'clock the previous night a gang of three men had burglarized a jewel and antique emporium on Grant Avenue. A watchman caught them in the act and apparently attempted arrest. The watchman was shot and killed instantly. His

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gun had not been discharged, yet one of the thieves had been found mortally wounded, and another had left a trail of blood to the curb, probably escaping by motor.

This undischarged weapon of the watchman presented "an element of mystery" but that did not interest me. Before he died, the wounded yegg stated that the head of the gang was Pedro Alicante. He said nothing more, but the police identified Alicante with a well-known crook of that name who had been notorious in New Orleans police circles. The account continued:

The full energies of the police department will be exerted to land Alicante and his surviving accomplice at once. One of them is certainly wounded. The blood-trail indicates that the escape was made by automobile, and it is hoped that some witness of the fleeing car will turn up.

No explanation of the shooting of the thieves has been reached, since the watchman apparently had not used his weapon. It is believed that in the confusion of the moment they shot each other, or else that Alicante tried to shoot down both his companions and make his escape with the loot.

This had taken place at eleven. And eleven forty-five had found me at Hyde and California with a sore head, a slashed arm, the name of Pedro Alicante in my overcoat, a pocket filled with jewels, and two pistols that had been recently used!

The conclusion was unavoidable. I was no other than Alicante—a yegg, a murderer! I dazedly fingered my sore head and attempted to reach some other conclusion from the evidence, but the deadly facts only riveted themselves more firmly upon me.

Then something revolted inside of my brain.

"I'll be —— if I'm Alicante!" I cried out, with more literal truth than I intended. "I won't be a dago crook and by the Eternal, I'm not! No matter who I am, I'll never give in to that supposition. I'll be Tom Smith from this moment forward!"

Tom Smith—that was a good, homely, safe sort of name. I was glad it popped into my head so handily.

Yet, for an instant, my firmness weakened. I recalled the crook who had tried to hold me up. What was it he had said? That he had seen the whole thing; that he had followed me from Grant Avenue. Alicante must have tried to shoot down his pals. This hophead or thug had followed him. Was this the truth of it?

No! If I yielded to the theory that I was Alicante, I would be lost. My one hope for mental safety, for sanity, for sturdy self-respect and free action, was to throw aside every atom of circumstantial evidence and forget it all. If I were Alicante, here was my chance to start clean.

"No ifs!" I said savagely. "I'm not Alicante, that's all. I'm Tom Smith, of Shanghai. Now what will I do first?"

Squarely between the eyes, the realization smote me. I was in a horrible predicament. If I went to the police with my story and asked to have my identity restored, I would be clapped into jail. That was a certainty. No police judge would refuse to credit the circumstantial evidence which positively convicted me of being Pedro Alicante, the murderer!

I seized the paper and scanned the news story again. There was no description of Alicante; the police had wired New Orleans for one. That settled it! I still had an excellent chance to destroy the evidence, get out of the hotel, and lose Pete somewhere.

Hurriedly, almost with panic upon me, I reached for my clothes and struggled into them. I was half-dressed, when the worst blow of all struck me and actually sent me reeling. I sat down on the bed and faced the thing.

When I came in here last night I had registered as P. Alicante, of New Orleans. And now the morning papers were full of this story! What opportunity would I have of leaving the hotel? None. It was too small an establishment to have any house police, but the chances were a thousand to one that ere this the day clerk had looked up the night register and had perused the papers.

"Think fast, Tom Smith, think fast!" I told myself. "You're in one —— of a hole right now. It's a matter of minutes before somebody is coming up here to make inquiries in a loud tone of voice. They'll figure that Alicante thought himself safe, that he knew nothing about his dying pal's having snitched on him. These police don't take any chances with a gunman. They'll come here in a hurry, and they'll come a-smoking! Get busy!"

FORTUNATELY my remnant of a brain rose to the emergency and impelled me to finish dressing. If I could leave this cursed hotel, I would be momentarily out of danger. The night

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clerk had probably given my face small attention, and would know nothing of what I wore beneath my overcoat. My traveling-cap was of plain dark cloth, rather heavy but similar in looks to a million others.

"I came from Shanghai, all right," I murmured. "Wish to —— I was there now! Come on, Tom Smith; it's your move, and you'd better hustle."

I took one look at the overcoat and left it where it was lying—the gems with it. I had no use for them. They were stolen property; I had plenty of money and did not need them, and they would prove mightily embarrasssing if later found in my possession.

Darting into the bathroom, I paused for a look at my face. It helped to restore my equilibrium. Assuredly it was not the face of a yegg! It looked a bit brutal, but it was not debased or criminal. The eyes were a dark gray. The reddish mustache was long and ragged.

"You're not a bad sort of guy, Tom," I observed. "But you need a clean shave quick!"

Swinging up the bathroom window, I glanced out.

My room was on the third floor front, but as the hotel was built upon a hill it was the second floor back. That helped. The fire-escape was one of these swinging affairs, balanced to fall with the weight of any escaping party.

"Thoughtful architect!" I murmured. "All ready, Tom. Go to it, and good luck."

The alley was deserted at the moment, and I lost no time pulling the Dougfairbanks stuff. Descending a fire-escape without a fire, in broad daylight, looks simple. It is actually about the most ticklish situation possible in a great city. You have one chance in ten of getting away with it. Every spectator is simply certain to heave a brick on the assumption that you are a sneak-thief.

In my case there were no spectators, and I reached the bottom of the escape without incident. Not waiting for the ladder to swing down, I hung by my hands and dropped. In another moment I had reached the street outlet of the alley, and was standing on the sidewalk beyond.

Now let 'em catch me if they could!

Hunger asserted itself. Breakfast, however, was only a dim, sad blur upon the horizon. Other things were more essential. I walked down to the corner and innocently glanced at the entrance to my late domicile. Oh, prophetic soul! Before the entrance stood a motor patrol.

Across the street was a barber-shop, and I made my way toward this. It was not much of a barber-shop, but at the time it was a haven of refuge. The proprietor was standing in his doorway, staring at the hotel, and the usual crowd was collecting about the patrol, which had plainly just arrived.

The night clerk was the only person who could recognize me as Alicante, and he was probably engaged with the police at this moment. My fears departed.

"What's the commotion about?" I asked of the barber, as I came to his shop.

"Search me," he responded. "The cops just came a minute ago—from the Bush Street station, I guess."

"Well, if it's all the same to you, I want a shave. Got time to work?"

"You know it."

He swung open the door for me. I removed coat and collar, while he tore his reluctant gaze from the hotel long enough to get out his tools and swing around his chair. I seated myself and relaxed.

"Bathe the top of my head when you get a chance," I said, fingering the bump there. "I fell down and hit my skull on the edge of the bathtub, and it's sore. Give me a clean shave, and take off this mustache."

He assented, with the hearty approbation displayed by every barber who is ordered to remove hirsute appendages. He wrung out a hot wet towel and laid it on my head, then adjusted others over my face.

"This is a right funny town, ain't it?"

He stropped away at a razor, to judge by the sound.

"You'll strike a guy with a reg'lar Boston accent, but he don't come from Boston, no, sir! He's from the Mission district. And the women here have ankles like fat babies—comes from walkin' up and down hill so much, likely, and exercising their tendons. Ever hear that story about the London——"

"Yes," I said. "I heard all about the London 'busman years ago. From the way you speak, you must be a stranger here."

"Well, I been here a year now. Come out from New Orleans. Done had a three-chair shop of my own there, but oil stock

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went flooey and I went West. Say, did you read about that there fracas in Chinatown last night?"

I grunted an assent.

"Well, sir—" he was warming to the work now, and began to spatter me indiscriminately with lather and conversation—"I'll tell the world that the cops sure are up against something! You bet. I know that fellow Alicante, and he's a bad— Here, hold still! I didn't go to get that in your eye."

"You say you know him?" I mumbled.

"Well, I ain't a personal friend, y' understand; not exactly. I seen him one time in New Orleans. He done pulled off a shootin' down there, and I was at the trial. He looked like real quality. They never did get him mugged, I hear. Everybody knows about him, but nobody ever convicted him. That guy ain't no cheap crook. He's one of these Raffleses; smart as a steel whip!"

I managed a feeble inquiry.

"What does he look like, then?"

"Well, he didn't look a whole lot diff'rent from you, in the face."

Over this he chuckled merrily, seeming to consider it an excellently savored jest. I did not. Presently his eyes wandered across the street.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "There's another station 'bus; must be a real riot inside. I bet some poor guy is getting beat up by his wife; been married twice myself. Want this here mustache clean off, eh?"

"Yes," I responded, and closed my eyes.

So Pete looked like me in the face, did he?

CHAPTER III

ALIAS WHO?

WHEN I left the barber-shop, two automobile patrols were in front of the hotel, and two bluecoats were talking by the door. I walked to the corner, saw another officer watching the alley entrance, and felt satisfied that I had no further business in this vicinity. I climbed aboard a cable car with a large feeling of self-congratulation.

"You were not thirty seconds too soon, Tom!" I told myself. "They've found Pete Alicante's overcoat and the loot is recovered; now they're combing the premises for Pete himself. That confounded barber certainly gave me a cold chill for a moment. But if you're related to Pete, how could he come from China?"

The more I thought it over, the less convinced was I that my arrival from China was any alibi for my undesirable self. What was to prevent P. Alicante's having been in China? Not a thing. He might have clung to his old overcoat, which was a good one; and immediately upon landing in San Francisco might have run into a couple of his pals, who had promptly taken him into consultation regarding the little job on Grant Avenue. What was more likely, indeed? What was more apt to the circumstances as I knew them?

This train of thought was discouraging so I dismissed the whole thing, firmly impressing upon my mind that I was Tom Smith of Shanghai. It was with an assurance of virtuous endeavor for the future that I dropped from the car at the corner of Grant and Market. I resolved to keep my new name, which ought to be common enough to keep me out of danger. And I certainly had as much right to it as to any other.

My immediate necessity was to find a home, but first I needed a toothbrush and such other things. I bought a new felt hat and what things I lacked; purchased a grip to carry them in, and considered the future. Since I was out to hide, the best method was to stand in plain sight. I had plenty of money to stand on, so I hailed the first empty taxicab that passed, and had Tom Smith carted to the St. Francis in style.

When I had registered at this hostelry and was waiting to be assigned a room, the clerk came back to me, frowning slightly.

"You were in on the *Siam** last night, sir, I believe?"

Here was a facer, sure enough! I had registered from Shanghai, of course; but how the deuce did they know I had just arrived?

"Yes," I assented helplessly.

"We had reserved the accommodations you ordered by marconigram, Mr. Smith, but gave them up at eleven last night. However, we'll be able to fix you up all right. Just one moment, please."

He turned away, held hurried consultation with other dignitaries behind the desk,

* In San Francisco common parlance and newspapers, the boats of this line usually drop the "Maru."

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and came back with an envelope in his hand.

"A marconigram just in this morning for you, sir. Your luggage will be sent up from the store-room immediately. Front!"

I followed the bellhop in a state of stupefied bewilderment.

Perhaps I should have then and there paused to explain that I was not the Thomas Smith of Shanghai for whom reservations had been made, but how the —— could I explain? The admission of my arrival on the *Siam Maru* had done the business. It was unlikely that two Tom Smiths of Shanghai had come by that boat.

Now my condition of helpless wonder threatened to become chronic. I had chosen that name because it seemed absolutely undistinguished, common, ordinary. It had not been suggested to my mind by reading the list of eminent arrivals in the newspaper, for I was certain that no Tom Smith had been on the list. It was a stroke of luck, nothing else. Some other Tom Smith had been due to arrive, and had sent his luggage to the hotel while he went off somewhere with friends. He would show up soon enough. Meantime, I was netted and snared in the gins of coincidence.

"There'll be —— to pay when Tom shows up!" I chuckled.

Upon reaching my new quarters, I perceived that the hotel mechanism worked admirably. Two porters were already carrying in Tom Smith's things—a very handsome trunk and an equally handsome suit-case. Not to be outdone by my friend's evidence of wealth, I tendered handsome tips and sighed with relief when the door closed.

Alone at last—for the second time in ten hours!

I had not breakfasted, but ignored this fact. Dropping my new purchases, I looked at the envelop in my hand, indubitably addressed to me. Opening another man's mail is one thing, and opening your own mail is a different thing. I was Tom Smith, and I opened my message. It afforded no particular light on the situation—quite the contrary, in fact.

> THOMAS SMITH, St. Francis Hotel, San Francisco.
>
> Original plan not safe. Do not visit headquarters. Arrangements made with them to visit you. Warn Elliot there has been a leak here. You and he probably in extreme danger. Use care.
>
> KILGORE.

This message had been sent from a man named Kilgore in Shanghai.

Here was a —— of a mess! It seemed that no matter what I did or where I turned, I dropped into hot water. Still, the present embroglio did cheer me up more than a little. It was quite depressing to fancy myself a yegg and murderer; but it was distinctly encouraging to discover that I had advanced into a higher class. Here was a hint of danger, of mystery, of romance! If I were still a crook, I had at least managed to become one of comparatively high rank.

"In extreme danger."

That afforded some light, after all. Very probably there had been a Thomas Smith aboard the *Siam Maru;* and I, whoever I was, had been acquainted with him. The name had thus come into my brain by logical auto-suggestion. That was plausible.

But where was good old Tom himself? He had not arrived this morning. He did not know there had been a leak, or that he was in extreme danger. His baggage had reached the hotel, but he had not. Ergo, the danger must have come upon him. He had been assassinated or something of the sort—thrown into the bay.

"The decent thing," I mused, "would be to warn Elliot. Who the deuce is Elliot?"

I STEPPED to the telephone and inquired whether there was any Elliot stopping here. The response was a negative. In the city telephone directory were eleven Elliots.* So that alley proved to be blind.

Passing to the suit-case and trunk, I examined them. Tom's taste met with my instant approbation. Both articles were sturdy and handsome. Various hotel labels proved that Tom had done considerable traveling about the Orient. The trunk was locked, and I left it alone. However, nine men out of ten do not lock a suit-case, and Tom was not the tenth. I opened up the grip, hoping to discover something tangible in the way of a clue.

My self-admiration grew by leaps and bounds. Tom had come provided with an outfit made to order; silk shirts, every one neatly laundered. They were of the right size to fit me, what was better. The suit-case yielded a gold-mounted toilet-kit; a

*Edition of February, 1920.

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large box of Manila cigars which must have cost about a dollar a throw; and numerous other articles of personal luxury which I felt would come in handy. There were no papers of any kind. At the very bottom of the grip—which was, remember, unlocked—I came upon a plain brown manila envelop. Finding it not sealed, I investigated the contents, which consisted of thirty hundred-dollar bills with a rubber band around them.

Lighting one of Tom's cigars, I sat down to think it over.

"One thing appears to be a dead certainty," I reflected cheerfully. "If the present system of changing identities is carried to its logical conclusion, I'll end up a millionaire. My alter ego did fairly well, with a few hundreds in his roll. Pete Alicante added to this a pocketful of jewels. Now Tom shows up with three thousand cash to shove into the pot. I claim this is rather decent of him."

It was. The general improvement in such things as tobacco and silk shirts was quite to my taste.

The soreness had practically gone out of my skull and by this time I felt in fine trim. So, filling a pocket with cigars, I left the room and carried the three thousand with me.

I left this money at the desk, to be put in the hotel safe to the order of Tom Smith. He would know I was fairly honest, at least. Then I headed for the dining-room, with a feeling that all was for the best while it lasted.

These events had required time. My combined breakfast-luncheon required more time, for I ordered everything in sight and ate most of it. I enjoyed this meal thoroughly. It was the first meal that I could remember having ever eaten. No doubt my old original self had put away several meals in the course of his lifetime, but the memory of these had completely disappeared. And what does it benefit a man if he gormandize and remembers it not?

When Tom had finished his meal, I inserted one of those fine Manilas between his teeth and led him forth. I felt better, more self-confident and supremely content in every way than I had felt in all the preceding twelve hours of my existence. If I could have met the gentleman who had belted me over the head and so introduced me to my present state of life, I would have slipped him a fifty-dollar bill with gusto.

Naturally I was certain that a doctor and a few glittering instruments would ultimately be able to bring me back to myself. At present I was entirely satisfied with Tom Smith.

The spice of threatened danger was alluring, extremely so. I only hoped the other Tom would not turn up too soon and spoil everything.

THE noonday sunshine and open air beckoned me forth to Powell Street. At the corner I bought an early afternoon newspaper and wandered on across to a bench in the park, feeling that plethoric sensation with which a fat cigar crowns a good meal. I was now completely removed from any complicity with Pedro Alicante. Opening the newspaper, I read about him in complete and perfect detachment.

He was in the paper, too, up to his neck! Here was an account of his brazen effrontery in taking a hotel room under his own name. At eight-fifteen that morning, the police had investigated. They discovered that Alicante was gone. He had gone in a hurry, leaving his overcoat and loot behind. The description of him, as published from that of the night clerk at the hotel, proved quite unlike the present Tom Smith. The police promised to have Alicante behind the bars within a few hours.

"I'll wager they don't!" I chuckled to myself. "That particular P. Alicante has been wiped clear out of existence. If any one tackles me now, I can prove up to the hilt that I am Thomas Smith of Shanghai."

It did not occur to me that I might soon be equally anxious to prove that I was not Thomas Smith of Shanghai.

Glancing through the paper for news of any mysterious disappearance which might give the clue to my own identity, or for any account of a murdered stranger which might give the clue to Tom Smith's whereabouts, I found my search quite vain. Nor did I care, at least as regarded myself.

I was firmly resolved to remain Tom Smith as long as possible. The unfortunate suspicion that I might really be Alicante was enough to keep me from any vaulting ambition to recovery my prior identity.

Finding nothing more to interest me in the paper, I rose and decided to take a stroll about town. I had money to spend, and

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reading-matter would be welcome. I had no idea of what Tom Smith's business might be, but such trifles could be taken up in due time. If my own money gave out, I would borrow from Tom.

In this pleasing state of mind, I sauntered on to Stockton Street and stood on the corner to observe my surroundings. It occurred to me that I lacked a stick to complete my general elegance. Happy at having found this worthy objective in life, I was about to start off when suddenly a large and handsome roadster gave a whining scream of brakes and slewed in to the curb beside me. I stepped back hastily.

"If you want the sidewalk, take it, but respect my toes," I told the driver.

He glared at me. To my astonishment I beheld recognition in his eyes; he must have slewed in purposely, in order to speak to me! I did not recognize him. He was a good-looking chap, heavy-set, and appeared to be quite apoplectic over something.

"You cursed fool, what are you doing on the street?" he demanded with the beautiful frankness of speech which exists between old friends.

"Walking," I returned cheerfully. "I just thought of going somewhere and buying a stick. Can you recommend a shop?"

He emitted an incoherent oath, and pounded on the wheel with his fist as if trying to bring forth words from the car. Then he leaned forward, threw a swift glance up and down the sidewalk, and shot out:

"Look here! For the love of Heaven, will you try and show some sense? Don't you know they're after you tooth and nail? Me, too. You go and hole up, and pull the hole in after you. Everything depends on your management, you big ass; do you think that losing your haw-haw mustache is going to disguise you?"

I reflected that this person in the expensive car seemed to know me. That is, he knew the man who had existed yesterday.

CHAPTER IV

SMITH UND SCHMIDT

NATURALLY my thoughts flew back to Alicante.

Was this the surviving member of his gang who had escaped by motor? The theory might do. According to my friend the barber, Alicante was a gentleman crook; and this chap certainly was extremely gentlemanly in his appearance.

"Beat it for cover!" he said, and reached for his gear-shift. "I'll probably see you in the morning, after I get things shaped up at my end."

"Hold on!" I saw that he was about to depart, and with him my first chance to get a line on myself. "Where are you off for?"

"Where for? Home, of course. I'll stay there all day, too. Telephone me when things are clear—or wait; I'll call you up. So long, and good luck."

He departed more genially than he had arrived, and I helplessly watched his fine car go speeding away toward Market Street.

For a moment his recognition alarmed me, but only for a moment. He had met me by sheer chance, and had undoubtedly taken me for Pete Alicante. On the contrary, I was in reality Tom Smith of Shanghai, and could prove it at the hotel.

By this time I was growing unhappily convinced that my original identity had been that of the New Orleans gunman. This made me more firmly determined to hang on to the comparatively aristocratic identity which I now owned. Evidently my unknown friend in the roadster had not approved of Pete's mustache. I agreed that it was better gone.

"*A bas* Alicante!" I murmured hopefully. "Down Alicante—up Smith! Devil take the yegg; I've nothing to do with him, and can prove it. Why worry?"

I entered a near-by bookstore, purchased some books and magazines, and ordered them sent to the hotel. Then I sauntered on toward Market Street, and presently came to a shop which could supply me with a stick. I went in and set about making a selection.

Most men prefer a light stick. Somehow, I had a notion that I desired a good heavy one and it was hard to find. While I was picking and choosing, a smiling, bespectacled Japanese gentleman came up and bought a malacca. He exchanged a polite word or two with me and then departed. After a little I came upon a stick of substantial ebony, and made off with it.

Upon my way back to the hotel, I again recalled that marconigram which Kilgore in Shanghai had sent to Tom. It was something of a puzzler. What headquarters were referred to, for instance? Why

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should I keep away from them? If police headquarters were meant, good old Kilgore, fine chap that he was, need have absolutely no fear. I was not going to putter around any police headquarters. Still, I imagined that some other kind of headquarters was in question.

I REACHED the hotel by a roundabout and leisurely route, and went inside. There I halted, indecisively. A hotel room, even the best of them, is rather a lifeless place. It was not yet quite one o'clock. Why not stay out for an hour or so? Why not spend the afternoon at a movie palace?

As I stood there, looking back at the street, I saw a well-dressed little man go past the entrance. He was a Jap, and he carried a new malacca stick. He was the same one—yes.

Turning, I proceeded thoughtfully to the desk. There I asked a few questions. Yes, shortly before noon there had been an inquiry for me. I had been paged without result. The clerk thought it was a Japanese, but could not remember exactly.

So I went up to my own room and discussed the affair with a fresh cigar. It began to look interesting, most certainly. Were the little brown men after Tom? If so, why? His danger might proceed from the Japs. Perhaps they had already killed him. If so, why should they follow me? Or could it be that Tom was lying hidden somewhere, and that they were taking me for him? Surely they must know what he looked like.

"Quit puzzling over it!" I commanded. "Quit, you fool, before you go mad!"

The telephone bell rang, and I welcomed the diversion. The office informed me that a Mr. Schmidt wished to speak with me.

"Good!" I answered. "Show him right up, will you?"

I hung up, and a virtuous glow warmed my bosom.

"Here's a friend of the real Tom Smith; maybe a relative of German extraction. He'll know I'm the wrong one. This will give me a chance for graceful exit from the rôle; explanations and all that. Everything will be lovely. Not that I care to back out, but I don't wish to pretend that I'm another man."

Thus I awaited Mr. Schmidt with great expectations, which were amply fulfilled when he appeared. This was no man, but a mammoth. A huge fellow with a handsome *porte-cochère* in front, two double chins, a really truly Wilhelm mustache, and the general arrogant air of one who has found his place in the sun.

My former admiration of the other Tom Smith rapidly lessened, if this were a sample of his friends! Then, to my astonishment, Schmidt clicked his heels together and managed a sort of bow.

"I haf the honor of speaking mit Mr. Thomas Schmidt?" he inquired in a rumbling voice.

"You haf," I said, not offering to shake hands. "Vill you downsit?"

This, perhaps, was a mistake. Schmidt gave me a glare, twirled his upcurled mustache and lowered himself to the edge of a chair. He was pure Prussian all over.

"I haf just found that you are here," he said. "I haf rushed to see that you are maging no mistake, for your own personal sake."

"I don't know you," I said.

"Ah! I am Heinrich Schmidt," he puffed. "Und I am burchasing agent for the Ghinese Rebublican Gofernment, und former brewmaster mit Schlitz——"

"Hold on," I cut in. "What Chinese Government? There happen to be two."

"I speak of the Bekin Gofernment, of course!"

Somewhat to my own surprize, I discovered that I was quite conversant with Chinese politics, doubtless because I had just come from China. There are many gentlemen in this country who claim connection with the Peking country; but not all are genuine agents. Also, as Japanese interests prevail in Peking, one has to step carefully.

"All right," I said, sitting down and picking up my cigar. "Your business with me?"

"It is goncerned mit the deal which you und your friends haf put ofer," said Schmidt, assuming his number one manner of insolence. He probably thought that he was making a tremendous impression. He was, too.

"Oh!" I said. "May I inquire whether you are a German subject?"

"I am not. I am a citizen of this gountry!" he stated puffily. "Und I haf called to see you before you have done anything rash. I am ready to open negotiations mit you."

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At this point, it occurred to me that I might as well manage the other Tom Smith's business affairs for him during his absence. However, being totally ignorant of the nature of the affairs involved, I went ahead cautiously.

"All right," I said. "Suppose you speak out! I'll hear your offer, anyhow."

He nodded his head in approval of this spirit.

"Goot! Now, we know already all about your negotiations mit the Shanghai peoples. Understand, I haf nothing to say against Doctor Sun! But you are goncerned mit a bad growd, mine friend; they will dreat you like a dog, und cheat you! Dat Shanghai growd is rotten."

A ray of light penetrated my befogged brain.

The marconigram spoke of a leak, also of some personal danger. My suspicions had been already directed toward the Japanese. Now this Sino-Pruss fellow bobbed up with a lot of loud talk about his "gofernment." The inference was plain. Peking itself was doing no spying. This Schmidt was actually an agent of the Japanese politicians who held a concealed fist behind the frightened old mandarin crowd in Peking.

When I speak of Japanese politicians, do not imagine that I mean the Japanese Government. I do not. There are good and bad Japanese, as there are good and bad Americans; but there are mighty few good professional politicians, in either place. Any Jack Cade who would base a new party on the cry of "Hang the politicians and burn their platforms!" would get my vote.

TOM SMITH, then, was dealing with China. He had something which the Shanghai people, the progressive and educated section of Young China headed by Sun Yat Sen, desired and were about to secure. What was this thing in question? Why was it important enough to make Schmidt so hot on the job the very day after Tom Smith reached San Francisco?

"Then," I inquired mildly, "will your crowd give better treatment—and offers?"

"*Nein!* Your friends haf already done too much. If Kilgore had come first to us——"

"Well," I said impatiently, "what's the offer? Put your cards on the table."

"Goot!" Schmidt's insolent pig eyes bored into me. "You und Elliot haf gome to gollect the money at this end. Then you und he go to vork und manufacture the meganism of Kilgore's gun, und ship the barts to Ghina. I am frank mit you! We haf already the plans gopied of the parts to be manufactured in Ghina, but they do us no goot mitout the plans of the breech und recoil meganism. That is why you manufacture those parts segretly in this gountry, eh?

"Now I tell you. All we ask is to gopy those plans, that is all, mine friend. Then go ahead und mage the machine gun for Ghina. Und to gopy those plans, I gif you ten t'ousand dollars, gash on the nail."

Schmidt leaned back and folded his paws across his enormous paunch, regarding me with an air of complacent satisfaction.

At last I had the line-up. The other T. Smith and his friends had invented some kind of machine gun. I have always entertained a fatherly feeling toward inventors; they are such a hopelessly impractical crew. Now, it appeared, Tom Smith was much in need of my managerial ability, and I determined that he should have it.

He and his friends had reached some agreement with the Shanghai Government. He had known that the gun could not be manufactured in China without Japanese spies finding out all about it; they had apparently found out a good deal already. So he and Elliot had come over here to collect advance payments from agents in this country, then to manufacture the chief parts of the gun and ship them to China.

This was logical enough, since the American-Chinese supply the Shanghai crowd with large sinews of war. It must be a first-class gun, if the Japs were so anxious to get their hands on it. Ten thousand was no bagatelle.

"In other words," I said reflectively, "you offer me ten thousand dollars if I will betray my associates?"

"Oh, gome!" protested Schmidt. "They will know nothing at all about it."

"Suppose I refused your terms and refused to deal with you at all?"

His Prussian eye transfixed me with a regular Hindenburg stare.

"Let me tell you vot happens!" he growled. "You lose! We take it anyway, und we pay nothing, und we kill you! We know your gun is goot. We intend to haf it. If you vill not sell, then we cr-r-ush you!"

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This was amusing, and I rose with a pleasant smile. Really, I felt very happy over managing Smith's business so well for him.

"There's something I want to show you," I said. He heaved up to his feet, thinking that he had won the game.

"Vot?"

"Come with me." I went across the room, opened the door, and then beckoned. He came up to me. I touched his arm and looked him in the eye.

"Mr. Schmidt, you are of a peculiar type of mind. You are indomitable, aren't you?"

"Eggsactly," he assented, beaming all over at this compliment.

"There's only one thing you understand," I went on meditatively. "Only one thing. The only thing that really impresses you, that really gets its point home to your indomitable brain, is—this."

I kicked him—hard.

He uttered one indignant "Woof!" and reached for the place I had kicked. My foot got to it first, and he started for the door. I followed him outside the room, kicking hard and fast. The last I saw of Schmidt, he was bellowing curses down the corridor as he went along.

I came back inside the room and closed the door, glowing with conscious virtue.

"Tom, you couldn't have done it better yourself!" I said happily. "And what's more, if I have any luck I'll collect that ten thousand for you yet!"

CHAPTER V

PEACE AT LAST

NOTHING is so uplifting and soothing to the heart as a good deed well done. All my worries anent Pedro Alicante were forgotten. I paced up and down the room, congratulating Tom Smith of Shanghai on having found a friend and protector; also, I was much gratified at finally understanding that marconigram from Kilgore. I liked this game.

"Headquarters" evidently referred to the local headquarters or agency of the Shanghai Government, wherever it might be. Tom Smith was to collect his money from them and go to work. As for me, I perceived that my job was to keep entirely away, for the other T. Smith probably had the plan of the gun-parts in his head and I had not.

Where was he? Palpably the Japs had not tucked him away; in such case, Schmidt would not have come to me. Fortunately the enemy did not appear to know Tom Smith by sight. They had probably been wirelessed to attend to him, I reasoned.

"Well, this beats being a cheap crook!" I thought cheerfully. "Tom is out of luck, so I'll play his hand until he shows up again. Maybe an auto hit him and he's languishing in some hospital-ward this minute, poor old chap. I'll keep the brown brothers occupied until he gets on his feet; that'll help him a lot. With one or two governments down on him, and Schmidt anxious to cr-r-rush him, he needs a bit of quiet rest."

I felt the need of a little rest myself. The past few hours had been undeniably interesting, but just a trifle crowded. A slight relief from the tedium of jewel-robberies and international conspiracy would be very welcome.

A hankering for a real movie had been stirring in my mind, and I resolved to see one. Then back to dinner. After dinner, a quiet evening reading in bed, utter relaxation in the lap of luxury. The only advantage of money is its ability to procure comfort, and I determined to take things easy while I was well-off.

So, collecting my hat and stick, I went down-stairs. At the desk I drew one of the clerks into a far corner and made him acquainted with a Federal Reserve note of substantial denomination.

"Now it's strictly up to you," I instructed him, "to see that I get some peace. When anybody drops in and asks for Tom Smith of Shanghai, you see to it that they're informed I'm out—*non est inventus!* I won't be back until ten tomorrow morning. Give 'em free play after that, but until ten tomorrow I don't want to entertain a living soul, see anybody I know, get a telephone call, or receive any message. Get me?"

"So taken and accepted, Mr. Smith."

"All right. Now introduce me to your head detective."

The house sleuth put in an appearance and adroitly made another greenback vanish.

"I'm going out," I told him, "and I have every expectation that while I'm gone some one will endeavor to rifle my room——"

"No chance," he asserted positively. "It can't be done in this hotel."

"Conceded. But I want it done, savvy? That's why I've left the room door unlocked.

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All I want of you is to keep an eye on that room. If any one gets in there by mistake, let him go ahead and depart happy. I like to make people happy. You have the party shadowed from the hotel and find out where he goes, that's all."

"I been in the business twenty years," he asserted plaintively, "and this is the first time I ever——"

"There's always a first time. So long!"

Being certain that there were on hand no papers, documents or plans belonging to Tom Smith, I did not mind letting any spy look over his laundry. I hoped that the possible spy would give me the line that I wanted, for I had a little scheme of my own afoot.

So I departed for Market Street. Twenty minutes later found me lined up before the ticket window of a gorgeous movie palace. The third man behind me was a strange Jap, and I beamed genially upon him.

By luck I obtained a front row balcony seat, lighted a cigar, and settled down to some solid enjoyment. I hoped for a complete getaway from my confusion of identities, and was at first successful. For an hour or more I was lost in the thrills of Alaska. I like to see Alaskan movies, largely because I have no desire to see Alaska in any other form.

After the great white North had properly engulfed *le pauvre poisson* of a villain, and the hero and heroine had dissolved in the final clinch, there was flashed upon the screen the *Daily Coast News*, a red-hot series of topical pictures dealing with coast activities. And, bang out of the box, the first heading that struck my eye was this:

HUNDREDS OF COOLIES LAND
FROM *SIAM MARU* EN ROUTE
TO CUBAN PLANTATIONS.

Here I found myself looking at the *Siam Maru* coming into dock, a picture not a day old! Some class to this daily news service, eh? Coolies were jumbled all over the screen; grinning, toothless, and scrawny Cantonese. After showing coolies *ad nauseam*, the title was flashed—

DISTINGUISHED PASSENGERS ARE LANDED.

Then some of the first-cabin folks were reviewed for popular consumption, and indicated by name.

Three seconds later I beheld myself standing on the ship's deck, gazing with a bored air at the camera. I looked better with a mustache after all. I rather enjoyed the sensation of meeting myself eye to eye and failing to recall my name; but the screen failed likewise to record my greatness. I was only an incident, a deck ornament, a common passenger. But I applauded my picture vigorously and let it go at that.

When the screen news was finished, I departed, for I had a big idea to put to work, and the afternoon was wearing on.

LEAVING the movie palace, I sought a telephone directory and looked until I located a firm of draftsmen. Then I telephoned for a taxicab, and drove away. It was nearly five o'clock when I reached my destination—an office in a high building on Mercantile Street. I was just in time to catch the two members of the firm in the act of closing up.

"You make all kinds of drawings and plans?" I inquired.

"Anything that can be drawn and much that can't," was the assurance.

"All right. I want to get the plans of the breech and recoil mechanism of a machine or rapid-fire gun." I handed out cigars and stated my wants. They were wants and no mistake; what I did not know about guns would fill books.

"I'm not particular about the design, not a bit," I concluded. "Any kind of a lethal weapon will do, ancient or modern, patented or non-patented, home-made or imported. Just so it is a machine gun and has the right name inscribed on the plans in large letters."

There was a suspicion in the air that I was a combination of grafter and con man, but I exorcised the evil thought. The firm eventually dug up the information that they had somewhere an old set of working drawings of such a gun. Some inventor had ordered them made, years ago, but had failed to take them up. I was welcome to them at a small cost.

They produced many large and dusty sheets covered with intricate ink-work. So far as I could see, that inventor had really invented something; it was the most ungodly set of gears and things I ever saw. The firm informed me that the gun, so far as they could see, appeared to involve some

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principle of solar energy, and was like nothing they knew of in the earth or in the waters under the earth.

That suited me to a dot. I picked out three big sheets which, they assured me, covered the mechanism in question. Across the bottom, not knowing Kilgore's initials, I had them inscribe: "Kilgore, Smith, Elliot et al., Shanghai, 1920." It was prominently written, in beautiful lettering.

With these plans rolled up beneath my arm, I returned to my waiting taxi. If any one had followed me, the obvious conclusion would be that I had called for certain plans which had awaited my coming.

No sooner had I entered the hotel than my friend the house detective appeared in some mysterious fashion, like Punch popping up in front of his curtains.

"Well, a guy showed up!" he greeted me. "He was a Jap. I followed your orders."

"Good work! Did you have him trailed?"

"Yep. He went straight to a Jap employment agency on Post Street. The Toyo Tahiri Company is the name of it."

I repaid the service with largess, and went on up to my room.

At first glance everything was as I had left it. The visitor had been clever. Upon closer examination I found that one distinct service had been rendered me. Thomas Smith's trunk had been left locked. Now it was unlocked.

I opened it, chuckling. There was no longer any doubt that the Japs were watching me, and I even had the location of the particular crowd I wanted to reach. This suited my plans excellently.

Smith's trunk proved to be full of clothes and nothing much else. I felt sure no important papers would have been left in it. As before, his admirable taste drew my full approbation. Here was an outfit to make any man shine with pride! I laid out a Tuxedo, superbly cut, and tried it on. The garments fitted to perfection. Since I was doing Tom a pretty good turn all around, I thought that he might make me the loan of a few clothes.

Accordingly I dressed for dinner. When I descended I not only looked like a gentleman but I felt like one. Whatever my previous state of reincarnation, I must have entertained a decided appreciation of the sartorial arts.

Down-stairs I hunted up a telephone booth, and searched the directory until I found the Toyo Tahiri Employment Agency. I inserted a nickel and called their number. Presently an unintelligible voice barked back at me.

"This is Mr. Thomas Smith at the St. Francis Hotel," I said slowly. "Give me the boss."

"You got wrong number," barked the voice. "Who you want?"

"Shut up and take that message to the boss! Thomas Smith, at the St. Francis."

Silence ensued. After a time there sounded a click, then came a smoothly gentle voice that spoke good English:

"Yas? Mr. Smith?"

"Speaking. This afternoon a man named Schmidt called on me. He was very offensive and I kicked him out. He made me a certain offer."

"Oa, yas!" A suspicion of amusement in this. "He vary offensive man, sar."

"Well," I said, "I've changed my mind. I can use that money at once, but I refuse to have any dealings with Schmidt. I don't trust him. Are you interested in the matter?"

"Maybe, sar," came the cautious reply. I had him hooked.

"Very well. If you care to call at my room in the hotel at ten tomorrow morning and bring the cash with you, you may also bring a draftsman and copy the plans in my presence. Will this be satisfactory?"

"Ex'lent, sar! Thank you vary much."

I hung up and went in to dinner. Business was over for the day.

As may be expected, I felt rather well over my clever deductions. Whoever I might be, the little old brain was banging away on all four cylinders.

"You ought to be in the secret service or something, Tom," I thought. "Another chappie would leave those fake plans lying around the room, so the Japs could steal them and be satisfied. But no, you do the thing artistically. Now you'll get a quiet evening, and wake up in the morning all shipshape."

I DINED leisurely and with much enjoyment. When the meal was over, I lighted one of Tom's excellent cigars and sauntered out into the lobby to finish my smoke before retiring.

While strolling about, I several times encountered a tall, quietly dressed man who had pronounced aquiline features and a

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clipped red mustache. There was a certain facial resemblance between us—nothing very definite, but some hint that was quite similar. This, I thought, was the reason why he eyed me so shrewdly whenever we met. At length, when we came together again, he paused and addressed me—

"I beg your pardon, sir, but may I have a word with you in private?"

"No," I said, wondering whether Tom knew him. "This is my off day."

I did not try to soften the refusal, for there was something in his manner I did not like. And I desired no words with any one in private.

"But this is a rather important matter!" His features hardened and I caught a distinctly hostile glitter in his eye. "May I inquire whether you were on Grant Avenue about eleven o'clock last night?"

This staggered me. The man might be a detective; there was no telling. So here was that accursed yegg business up in the foreground again!

I shook my head.

"See here, my friend, I'm fed up with business for the day. I don't know and don't care what you have on your mind. If you wish to call at my room tomorrow morning about eleven, I'll see you."

"Thank you!" There was more than a hint of mockery in his voice and in the glitter of his eye. "I'll be most happy. I thought that I recognized you, even without the lip ornament. Tomorrow at eleven!"

He bowed slightly and passed on, leaving me distinctly perturbed.

—— Alicante! I tossed away my cigar and went up to my room. As I stepped into the elevator, I glanced back to see my late accoster speaking with the house sleuth; no doubt ascertaining who I was. Well, they'd have a stiff job linking up Tom Smith with any crook!

In my own room, I locked the door, went to bed, and read quietly until sleep claimed me. I was content to call it a day and leave my troubles on the shoulders of Morpheus.

CHAPTER VI

ALICANTE

I MUST have had some premonition that my morning was to be a busy and even an exciting one, for I slept like a top and wakened fit as a fiddle.

A bath and a shave, a careful selection from Tom's sumptuous wardrobe, and by nine I was breakfasting like an emperor. Little did I dream that when this day ended, the real Tom Smith of Shanghai would be occupying my present comfortable position.

At nine forty-five I approached my friend the desk clerk. He grinned at sight of me and flung up his hands in a gesture of whimsical helplessness.

"We've obeyed orders, Mr. Smith, but it was some job! We've had white men, yellow men, brown men, and a few others trying to see you, and the Chinatown exchange has been calling you every half-hour. There's a bunch of notes and letters and cables——"

"Let 'em rest," I said. "Send them up to my room at six tonight. The ban is lifted for callers in fifteen minutes, and I'm expecting a Japanese gentleman then. If any one else turns up, call me and I'll give orders according to how I'm feeling."

"What is it, anyhow?" he queried smilingly. "A mail-order scheme or politics?"

I hushed his curiosity and went to my own place.

Promptly at ten one Mr. Haru was announced and ordered up. He entered the room with a smirking bow, and proved to be no other than my friend of the malacca stick. He now carried a small grip and kept his right hand close to his coat pocket.

"Don't bother about the pistol, Mr. Haru," I said, waving him to a chair. "I'm not going to assassinate you. Did you bring the coin?"

"Oa, yas!" He patted the bag. "And I am ex'lent draftsman, sar."

"How did you happen to trust me so far?" I asked him frankly.

He grinned at this.

"We know your reputation, sar, for honorableness. Besides, we are willing to risk something, yas!"

They must have wanted that gun pretty badly. I rose, looked up my three plans, and laid them on the table. There was a chance that he would discover the fake, but on this head the odds were quite even.

"Pay your money and take your choice," I said grimly. "And if word of this ever gets to my partners, I'll hunt you up and put a bullet through you!"

He bowed, an eager sparkle to his black eyes.

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"Sar, I vary discreet. Will you be pleas' count money?"

"Can't bother," I rejoined, taking the bag and tossing it behind the bed. "Go to it, and get out in a hurry."

He darted to the table, bending over the sheets of paper there; to my delight, he sucked in his breath with a hiss of approval. He knew nothing about Kilgore's gun, of course; he had merely been ordered to get these plans, and that they did not fit the plans of Kilgore would not be discovered until they reached Japan.

Haru produced tracing-paper and pencils and dropped into a chair. With an occasional glance at me he jumped into the work of copying all three plans. He seemed to make something coherent of them, which was more than I could say for myself.

I sat back, smoked my cigar, and watched him with much inward satisfaction. I was making money for Tom and myself, and I had no compunctions whatever about it. I had not guaranteed what I was selling. Anyway, these designs might interest the Japs. Why not?

The little brown man was a fast worker. He was also extremely on the *qui vive*. When the telephone bell jangled he had me covered with an automatic before I could budge.

"Forget it," I said unconcernedly, and went to the telephone. "Well?"

The operator must have known I was in the room. She had already plugged in.

"This you, Tom?" came a voice. "Elliot speaking."

"Oh, hello!" I answered with a grin at Mr. Haru. He still covered me suspiciously. "Say, I've been trying to reach you! Had word yesterday from Kilgore to warn——"

"Old stuff, old stuff!" intervened Elliot impatiently. "See here, Tom, why the deuce have you been acting so queer? Doctor Chang says you've refused to see him or any one——"

"The lid's off now," I said hastily. "Tell the doc to get up here before noon."

"Noon?" came the scornful response. "We'll be there a darned sight before noon. I'm going around now to get Chang and bring him."

"What does he want?" I parried. It must have been a fool question, for Elliot swore most shamefully.

"*Want?* My Lord, are you drunk? We still have to conclude the deal, you ass!" With that he hung up. I slumped back into my chair, feeling suddenly bowled out. This Doctor Chang was a Chinaman—the agent with whom I had to conclude Kilgore's deal!

MR. HARU concluded that he was in no peril and resumed his work while I sat in dazed bewilderment. In another five minutes Haru grabbed at his papers and stuffed them into his pocket. He rose and bowed.

"I thank you, sar——"

"By the way," I asked, prompted by sudden impulse, "do you read Chinese?"

He assented. I produced the card bearing the embossed ideographs, also the red paper of imposing appearance, which I had found in my original pockets, and requested him to translate them. He glanced at them, then favored me with a queer look. He was suspicious. He perhaps thought I was trying to detain him here.

"This card bears name of Future Welfare Association, a political organization of young Chinamen," he said.

He laid down the card and the red paper.

"This paper bears vary fine letter from S'anghai—" he pronounced the word like a Cantonese— "and you know contents parfectly, sar. I think I go now."

I let him go, of course, and was glad when the door closed.

It now appeared that I was on the verge of a still deeper mix-up. Those two bits of Chinese writing had been in my own possession when I wakened to my present state of existence. They had not belonged to the other Tom Smith, but to me. Therefore I, the mysterious alter ego of this tangled equation, must have been concerned in Chinese politics across the water. This might account for my instinctive knowledge of yellow affairs.

So, when I met Elliot and Doctor Chang, they would at once know that I was not their Tom Smith and they might know who I really was. Elliot must have come over on the same boat with Tom and me.

I glanced at the time; ten-forty. I had twenty minutes before my friend of the red mustache and the slight facial resemblance would show up. I took my hat and left the room. Once in the lobby, I dodged out by the Post Street entrance and took a good brisk walk around the block. My brain needed clearing, I can tell you.

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I finally decided to face the matter squarely and shove things through to a show-down. Elliot was a partner of Tom Smith, and ought to be informed of the affair as it actually stood at present. Having reached this sensible conclusion, I beat up for the main hotel entrance.

Two men were standing beside the curb, talking. The man facing my way looked hard at me, and then looked again. Recognition dawned in his eyes. By this time I was used to being recognized by perfect strangers, but there was about this fellow something that seemed familiar.

I saw him clutch at his companion's arm and stare after me and suddenly I darted into the hotel, a ghastly panic working like yeast in my soul. The man was the night clerk in that California Street hostelry who had assigned Pete Alicante to a room. And now he had certainly recognized me as Alicante!

I had almost forgotten Alicante that morning, since he had been crowded off the front page of the papers, uncaught. However, I reflected that I could bluff out this night clerk; and after ducking into an elevator, I realized that there was very little to fear from the encounter.

When I stepped into my own room, the telephone was ringing for me.

"Gentleman to see you, Mr. Smith," said the desk clerk. "Refuses to give his name but says he has an appointment."

"Show him up, show him up," I responded wearily. "And listen! Show up anybody else as fast as they come. If I have to hold a reception committee here, let's cut out the telephone altogether. Shoot everybody straight up to my room, and tell the house detective to stand by for trouble."

"He's doing that already, sir," came the ominous response.

He was, was he? Well, I had an uneasy conviction that trouble was coming in large black patches, and coming quick. If the Future Welfare Association got the idea that I had sold out to the Japs, Tom's goose would be cooked to a crisp before any explanations could be had! I had not thought of this contingency, but it occurred to me now with sobering force.

It was here that I decided I would like to get out of Tom Smith's shoes. I do not object to excitement in moderation, but things were getting a trifle hot just now. Still, there was no backing out at this mo ment, so I did the next best thing—got ready for any possible trouble.

Taking the handsome little English automatic which I had found in my own pocket, I went to the bed and laid it just under the edge of the turned-back counterpane. It made a fairly flat, inconspicuous little bulge; and it comforted me, somewhat as a friend hidden in the clothes-press. I would scarcely have any use for a gun in such a hotel as this but I was past taking chances.

A KNOCK at the door, and my unknown accoster of the lobby had arrived.

He came into the room and closed the door, looking at me with those coldly menacing eyes. I did not exactly relish the way he stared, nor the aggressive manner he used in addressing me.

"Well," he said, "do you want to answer my question about Grant Avenue?"

"My dear fellow," I responded, gesturing to a chair and the open box of cigars on the table, "I'm willing to answer anything in the world. But, first, I would like to know with whom I am speaking."

He started slightly, then a smile crept to his lips; the thin, unlovely ghost of a smile. It was not pretty, either.

"Upon my word!" he ejaculated. "I believe that you actually do not recognize me!"

"Your belief is well founded. Then you know who I am?"

He cocked his head on one side and surveyed me. Reaching out one arm, he took a cigar from the box, but without removing his eyes from me. He was a wary bird.

"I know," he said, biting off the end of the cigar and then deliberately pausing to light it, "I know that you're calling yourself Tom Smith of Shanghai."

"It's easily proved," I retorted with dignity. "If you doubt it——"

He chuckled suddenly. "Not in the least! I've always heard that there was real class to the crooks who hail from abroad. Now I see it's true."

"Crooks?" I repeated. "Come, my friend, choose your words more carefully——"

"Oh, forget all that bull!"

He shot out the words, his suavity abruptly changing to a curt ferocity.

"Your work night before last swept me

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off my feet; I never saw anything swifter in my life. You're a cool hand, I admit!"

"You saw me?" I felt an uneasy conviction that he was speaking the truth. "Where?"

"I suppose," and his sarcasm was elaborate, "you know that there was a shooting pulled off in Grant Avenue recently. Well, don't bother to do any more lying. I've been looking for you, and I've got you!"

He was juggling a small box of matches in one hand. Now he carelessly thrust them into his pocket. It was well done, exceedingly well done. I suspected nothing until the pistol leaped out and covered me.

"Put 'em up!" There was steel in his voice. I obeyed the mandate.

"You're a detective?"

Again a laugh broke from the man. There was no mirth in it, and no mirth lay in his eyes. Those eyes were hard, cold, murderous.

"Detective?" he jeered. "This is pretty rich, for a fact! Are you trying to put over something on me?"

"Good Lord, no!" I returned, sobered by that danger-flare in his eyes. "To the best of my knowledge, I never saw you in my life before last night!"

"That's a big compliment from one crook to another and I take it as such," he said, after scrutinizing my face for a moment. "You see, I did give you credit for knowing me again."

"Who are you?" I snapped.

"Pedro Alicante, of course. Keep 'em up, you fool!"

CHAPTER VII

THE OTHER SMITH

TO SAY that I was staggered, puts it mildly.

Alicante in person—this man the murderer! I was absolutely paralyzed, shocked into stone. I could only stare at him like a fool. He rose and came to me, ran his hands down my body, and then returned to his chair at the table. He laid down his pistol; having found me quite unarmed, and gave me a pleasant grin.

"Caught you off guard, eh? Well, sit down and talk it over."

I slowly backed to the bedside, still staring at him, and sat down on the edge of the bed. I lowered my arms without reproof. Indeed, he went into a burst of laughter at my stupefied expression, although he did not cease to watch me narrowly.

"So you recognize me now, do you? I half-suspected you had laid a trap for me here, but decided to take the chance. I've been stopping here for some time myself."

Never having seen Alicante that I knew of, I did not recognize him; but I nodded to keep him in good humor. He chuckled again.

That he told the truth about himself was indubitable. Alicante appeared to be notorious as a gentleman crook—a paradoxical expression which quite covered his case. His nerve was consummate. Imagine his audacity in making one of the largest hotels in San Francisco his habitat.

At all events, it was now plain to me that I was not and never had been Pedro Alicante. For this much, I felt thankful.

The man, perfectly calm, watched me. He was thoroughly at ease, with the absolute relaxation of a tiger watching his prey, ready to spring each instant. Every line of him denoted his colossal impudence, his supreme assurance, his deadliness. He was playing a game of the most desperate character, and he played it like the veteran in crime which he was.

"That I ran into you here was pure good luck," he observed, studying me. His eyes hardened again, became merciless. "I suppose you thought you were doing a noble and glorious action when you bumped off one of my pals, wounded another, and chased me up California Street. I figured you as a crook, but now I see I was wrong. You're a simpleton. Well, Smith—" and he sneered— "we have to pay high for doing noble actions."

I made no answer. He eyed me speculatively.

"I think you were a big boob playing in luck," he pursued. "The way you gave up the loot and my overcoat proves it. Or perhaps you were drunk. Well, there's no time now for post mortems! You did throw the cops off my trail, and for that I thank you."

"Do you intend to murder me?" I asked dully.

"Don't be a fool. Do you suppose I go around killing people for fun? That cop butted in with a gun the other night, and got his. Then you butted in with a rabbit's foot and raised —— with us. Now you're going to pay up."

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"In what way?" I inquired.

"Literally. Money." He spoke with crisp arrogance, conscious that he was master of the situation. My hand was resting on top of my automatic, but he was ignorant of that interesting fact.

"I've looked you up," he went on. "You've just landed from China; either some kind of a contractor, or a government agent. Anyhow, you're certain to have some loose cash on hand. How much have you in the hotel safe?"

"Three thousand," I answered truthfully.

"That'll do for me, with what you have on you," he rejoined with a nod. "Then I'll leave you tied up here, while I beat it. You won't be hurt, and I'll make my getaway."

"You have your nerve to pull off this kind of a hold-up!" I said.

"Certainly. No one ever accused me of lacking nerve." He leaned back in his chair and grinned at me, as if feeling mightily pleased with himself.

This was exactly the moment to abandon all diplomacy. I abandoned it with a rush, regardless of consequences.

Alicante caught the movement of my hand, guessed its import, and his hand darted out to his pistol. He was too slow by five seconds. I fired. I regret to say that owing to the haste of the occasion, instead of nipping his arm I sent the bullet into his shoulder. The impact flung him back in his chair.

"Stay there!" I cried. "Steady!"

He snarled like a trapped beast. I sat on the bedside, ready to drill him if he moved again toward his weapon, and he stayed quiet, clutching at his wounded shoulder.

FROM the corridor came a rush of feet and a clamor of voices. My unlocked door was thrown open. I did not glance around, for I dared not take my eyes from Alicante. His face was murderous, vicious, frightful in its tense hatred. Then into my range of vision came the house detective, followed by a regular policeman and my friend the night clerk of the California Street hotel.

"That's him! That's him!" yipped the night clerk, excitedly waving his arm at me.

"Quite true," I observed. "Beyond all doubt, I am me. But, gentlemen, if you are looking for Pedro Alicante, he is sitting at the table yonder. Officer, kindly grab his gun so that I can remove my gaze from him. He's a tricky customer."

For a moment or two there was considerable fuss and flourishing of weapons. But when that night clerk got a good look at the real Alicante, he weakened in his identification of me. The poor chap really became undecided. As for Alicante, he fainted from pain and so lost any chance he might have had to complicate matters.

I explained the situation somewhat. The policeman was none too sure that some sort of game was not being played on him. He handcuffed Alicante, and then proposed to take me to the station also and play safe until my identity was proved. At this juncture, there came fresh alarums and incursions, and into the room stalked my chubby friend of the big roadster.

"Hullo!" he cried. "What the deuce is all this?"

The house detective whirled on him, and pointed to me.

"Do you know this man? Can you identify him?"

The chubby one looked at me, his eyes twinkling. I thought him, remember, a friend of Alicante. To my utter amazement, he nodded emphatically and made prompt answer.

"Certainly! That's my friend Tom Smith. What's the trouble?"

There was a short explanation, through which I sat dumfounded. My identifier produced a card-case.

"There's my card, gentlemen—Bob Elliot, of Harker and Elliot, attorneys. I'm only too glad to identify Smith, of course."

So this was Elliot! I was speechless, quite swept out of my depth. A thin Chinaman wearing large spectacles now edged his way into the room, but no one regarded him. The house detective motioned to the cop.

"It's all right. I know Mr. Elliot, and I'll answer for Smith. You'd better get this yegg out of here without any further fuss. Where's your partner?"

"Down-stairs."

They picked up poor Alicante, none too gently, and left the room. The thin Chinaman shut the door and came forward, nodding as if he knew me.

I looked at Elliot, knowing that it was high time for confession. And to think that I had suspected him of being Alicante's accomplice!

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"Well," I said uncertainly, "it's mighty white of you to help me out of this mess, Elliot! I don't know why you did it, but——"

"What d'you mean?"

He stared at me in a queer way.

"Identifying me as Smith, of course. Suffering ——cats! I thought that when you found me occupying Smith's place you'd raise Cain."

He gave me a stupefied look, then glanced at the Chinaman.

"Doctor Chang, is this Tom Smith or isn't it?"

"Of course." The celestial smiled. "It's quite all right, Mr. Smith——"

"I'm not Smith!" I exclaimed desperately. "Haven't you two men any sense?"

Elliot took a step backward.

"Not Smith!" he cried. "Not Smith? My Lord, am I crazy? What kind of a game are you pulling off?"

"Oh, quit it!" I returned, exasperated by his stupidity. "You know blamed well that I'm not Smith. I just took that name because it popped into my head."

We stared at each other in stark silence.

In this long moment of dead suspense, a frightful realization slowly worked itself into my brain. It came to me from the eyes of these two men. It came gradually but with a dread certainty which I could not escape.

I really was the other Tom Smith!

CHAPTER VIII

MY OWN SHOES

I WAKENED in a strange environment—lying on a bed in a hospital room, with bandages about my head. Queerly enough it seemed to be daylight, although my last memory was of eleven o'clock at night. Then I discovered Bob Elliot sitting beside me.

"Hello!" I exclaimed. "Did they catch 'em?"

Elliot leaned forward and caught my hand, eager happiness in his eyes.

"Catch who, Tom?"

"The crooks. I must have been hurt in the fracas, eh? I saw 'em shoot down the watchman, and I pitched into the gang. Had my Browning at work before they realized I was around. One of them gave me quite a scrap; closed in and nearly did for me. I chased that chap a couple of blocks up the hill, but all I got was his overcoat——"

The door opened. A white-clad surgeon came into the room.

"Stop that talking!" he snapped. "A very successful operation, Mr. Elliot! It's most fortunate that Mr. Smith consented to have it performed—highly interesting case!"

"Is he all right, then?" queried Elliot eagerly. The surgeon looked me over and assented, after the fashion of his caste.

"Well, he's recovered his lost identity, hasn't he? Take it quietly, Mr. Smith. You've been out of your head a few days. I fancy you'll remember everything a little later on."

I remembered some things right then, and a groan came from me. Out of my head! Then what had happened? How long had I been laid up?

Elliot read my eyes and turned to the surgeon.

"See here, doctor, let me ask Smith one question!"

The surgeon nodded assent. Elliot leaned over me.

"Everything's all right, Tom, except that we can't find the specifications Kilgore gave you—the parts we have to manufacture. I have a steel man to see, waiting for me. Doctor Chang is ready to hand over the money on receipt of the order from Shanghai. Where is the order, and where are the plans?"

"The order is somewhere in my clothes, in a leather bill-fold," I answered. "And in my suit-case, which is unlocked, you'll find some silk shirts. One of the shirts has yellow stripes. Look inside that shirt, and you'll find the specifications."

"Is this some important matter?" demanded the surgeon, and Elliot nodded. "Then run along and finish it up. Bring back good news, and relieve his mind. He needs to relax utterly, and needs sleep. Ease his mind and he'll be all right."

Bob Elliot gave me one beaming, significant glance, and departed.

I lay there with my eyes closed, while I awaited his return. Heaven knows to what anxiety I was a prey! Yet I was fairly certain that the gun specifications were safe. The most acute thief or spy would not look inside shirts fresh from the laundry, lying in an unlocked grip.

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Everything flooded back into my mind up to a certain point.

Bob and I had made our plans away back in Shanghai. When the *Siam Maru* docked, he was going home. I was going to the St. Francis. Thus suspicion, if there were any, would be divided between us. He was an attorney handling some large affairs in this country for the Shanghai Government, while I was only a friend of Kilgore.

Accordingly I checked my things to the St. Francis. Then, anxious for a change from the confinement of shipboard, I said farewell to Bob and started to walk up-town. Finding myself safe in San Francisco after weeks of worry and suspicion and intrigue was like a tonic in the blood.

This was late in the afternoon. At the corner of First and Market Streets I ran slap into Randolph Harkness—hadn't seen the old boy since we held down the bridge-head at Cologne together, in post-armistice days. Harkness lived in Berkeley, and was headed for home and some sort of celebration dinner at the Beta house. He insisted on dragging me along—said I'd be no true Beta if I didn't come—and so I consented joyfully.

It was after ten when I landed from the ferry again and once more started to walk up-town. To tell the truth, that dinner had not been altogether a prohibition affair, and I turned up Sacramento Street instead of going on to Powell. This brought me to Chinatown. I ran plump upon Pedro Alicante's little entertainment, took a share in it, chased one of the gang several blocks up a steep hill——

And there my memory quit cold.

I lay in bed, hoping against hope that my "few days" of mental disarrangement had not played the deuce with things. Every now and then a nurse came along to inspect me, but I pretended sleep. The time passed with terrific slowness. Every minute dragged like an hour.

At length I heard the door open. Elliot came into the room. He walked up to the bed and laid a small hand-bag beside me. His eyes were bulging.

"Find them?" I exclaimed.

"Yes. All safe."

He stared at me, mopped his brow, and then swore.

"Tom, you've been raising —— somehow! See here, this hand-bag was in your room. It contains ten thousand in cash. Where did it come from?"

"Ten thousand?" I repeated blankly.

"Exactly. Where on earth did it come from? Is it yours?"

"I don't know," was my admission. Elliot swore again and flung up his hands.

"Good Lord! Well, I'm off to the bank with it, then to meet Doctor Chang and the steel man. And, for the love of Mike, will you kindly try and remember what you've been doing in the last day or two? So long."

He rushed away. I closed my eyes, and tried hard to remember.

You may judge for yourself whether I succeeded!

THE BLOOD REMEMBERS

By Thomas J. Murray

THE tedious days of trade and dull routine
Fade far before an odor or a glance;
And some force paints across the past's dim screen
The days of dear adventure and romance.
Again we hasten on some red advance
Across Assyrian plains, or where the Nile
Loiters through Egypt we deploy with lance,
Sweeping to conflict where the temples pile.

Abroad with Claverhouse on Highland fells
We hear the tribal cry from glen to shore;
The strain of calling bugles drifts and swells,
And we are far at clashing Marstonmoor.
The blood remembers at the vagrant stir,
And pageants from the splendid past recur.

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The CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

WHILE we can't reprint old songs and poems unless we know the publisher and can get his permission, we can always pass on to an inquirer the words sent in by one of the rest of you. How about this one?

Chicago.

Would like to see the song entitled "In the Dreary Black Hills" published in a future number of *Adventure*, if some of the boys can recall the words. I don't think it has ever been published.—WM. E. MENZEL.

THERE are quite a number of archeologists among us. Here's a Chinese problem for them:

Norristown, Pa.

I happen to be one of those, who, though having seen quite a good bit of the world, have never had what is usually called an adventure, so have enjoyed hearing of others' experiences.

WHILE not exactly apropos the letters about guns, I wonder how many of you have seen the Chinese magazine cross-bow, which might easily be the prototype of the modern magazine rifle.

When I first saw one, hanging over the shop door of a bow-maker in Peking, I tried hard to buy it, but, though offered a most ridiculous price for the carved piece, the owner refused to sell.

You would hardly believe a poor Chinese artificer would refuse $500 for it, but he did, saying it had been the "chop" of his shop and his fathers before him, since the time of Hung-chi, over 400 years ago, and this may easily be true, for, as you know, trades are handed down from father to son for generations there.

He very willingly offered to make me a rough copy simply to show the mode of operation, for twenty cents Mexican.

IT IS made in two parts, the lower having the bow wedged in a hole at one end and a cross handle at the other. The upper edge of this part, which is about three inches wide, is concave and the upper half is convex, to fit it and to move easily along it.

The bow-string passes through a longitudinal slot in this upper half and has a strong downward pull, which helps to keep the two together. The upper part is the magazine and the bore is an extension of the slot. There are two toggle levers fastened to the lower half, then to the upper half and extend about eight inches upward, where they unite to make what might be the bolt action.

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Throwing the bolt forward, the string drops into a shallow slot in the bottom of the magazine and at the same time an arrow which had lain on the string, drops in front of it. Drawing the bolt back bends the bow. The toggle joint keeps the halves apart until the bow is fully bent, when a trigger under the string releases it and the arrow is discharged.

The magazine on my bow holds eight arrows and they can all be fired in five seconds or reloaded in the same time. With two men to operate it, it can be fired continuously until the operator's arm gives out, at a speed of sixty shots a minute. The gun was intended to be used from the top of a wall and would be quite effective.

Then, too, I have a most ingenious cross-bow, for firing bullets, which will easily drive a bullet through a half-inch board.

ANOTHER thing which may be of interest: Gunpowder is supposed to have been discovered in the 13th century; the Great Wall was built between 300 B.C. and 200 A.D., yet in the section of the Wall at Shan-Hai-Kwan there are embrasures in the wall, just below the bottom of the parapet and a recess in the floor just large enough to hold the old cannon of which a few were still to be seen. These were cored out and never bored. A careful examination failed to show any indication that the portholes were made at a later date than the wall, though I suppose they might have been. I'm not offering any theories—merely stating what was, to me, a very interesting fact.—D.

SOMETHING, in self-defense, from Arthur O. Friel as to the tailed men in his story in this issue: I wish he'd "burden" us more.

As a general thing I don't believe in burdening the Camp-Fire with dope concerning my yarns. This tale of "The Tailed Men," however, is so unusual that I can anticipate this derisive query by sundry gents from Missouri: "Men with tails? Say, Friel, where the merry heck do you get that stuff?" So I'm going to get the jump on these members of our sewing-circle by telling the world just where I get that stuff.

FIRST, a few remarks by Padre Noronha, a priest of the Amazon, as quoted by Count de Castelnau, French explorer, and requoted by Lieut. William Lewis Herndon, U. S. N., who descended the Amazon in 1851, in an official report to the Secretary of the Navy, who in turn passed it to the United States House of Representatives, Thirty-third Congress:

"The Indians, Cauamas and Uginas, live near the sources of the river. The first are of very short stature, scarcely exceeding five palms (about three and a half feet); and the last (of this there is no doubt) have tails, and are produced by a mixture of Indians and Coata monkeys. Whatever may be the cause of this fact, I am led to give it credit for three reasons: first, because there is no physical reasons why men should not have tails; secondly, because many Indians, whom I have interrogated regarding this thing, have assured me of the fact, telling me that the tail was a palm and a half long; and thirdly, because the Reverend Father Friar José de Santa Theresa Ribeiro, a Carmelite, and Curate of Castro de Avelaens, assured me that he saw the same thing in an Indian who came from Japura, and sent me the following attestation:

" 'I, José de Santa Theresa Ribeiro, of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Ancient Observance, &c., certify and swear, in my quality of Priest, and on the Holy Evangelists, that, when I was a missionary in the ancient village of Parauau, I saw a man called Manuel da Silva, native of Pernambuco, or Bahia, who came from the river Japura with some Indians, amongst whom was one—an Infidel brute—who the said Manuel declared to me had a tail; and as I was unwilling to believe such an extraordinary fact, he brought the Indian and caused him to strip, on pretense of removing some turtles from a "pen," near which I stood to assure myself of the truth. There I saw, without possibility of error, that the man had a tail, of the thickness of a finger, and half a palm long, and covered with a smooth and naked skin. The same Manuel assured me that the Indian had told him that every month he cut his tail, because he did not like to have it too long, and it grew very fast. I do not know to what nation this man belonged, nor if all his tribe had a similar tail; but I understood afterwards that there was a tailed nation on the banks of the Jurua; and I sign this act and seal it in affirmation of all that it contains.' "

Second, a remark by one M. Baena regarding the Jurua:

"In this river there are Indians, called Canamas, whose height does not exceed five palms; and there are others, called Uginas, who have a tail of three and four palms, according to the report of many persons."

Third, something by the Count de Castelnau himself:

"Descending the Amazon, I saw one day, near Fonteboa, a black Coata of enormous dimensions. He belonged to an Indian woman, to whom I offered a large price, for the country, for the curious beast; but she refused me with a burst of laughter. 'Your efforts are useless,' said an Indian who was in the cabin; 'that is her husband.' "

All right, laugh! When you're through snickering I'll spill some more dope for you. Here it is:

The coaita (or coata) is the tallest of the Amazonian monkeys, and is considered by naturalists to be the highest development of the American type of apes. Its disposition is mild and affectionate, and the Indians are very fond of it as a pet. And its most striking feature is its tail, which is highly prehensile—so much so that a coaita shot out of a tree can, in falling, catch a bough with its tail alone and crawl back on the limb. If there be anything in heredity, is it not possible that any creature fathered by a coaita would be likely to have Daddy Coaita's tail?

In this connection let's proceed to another point. I'm no embryologist, but in days gone by I've dabbled in a few other -ologies, and in so doing I came across the following scientific fact: During the process of gestation, the human embryo passes through successive stages of development in which it closely resembles the embryos of lower forms of life. And in one period of this development the human embryo *has a rudimentary tail*. Furthermore, there are cases on record in which this tail persisted in children *after* birth, and even in full-grown adults. I'm not talking about Amazonian Indians now, either, but about folks right here in the U. S. A.

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You don't have to take my word for this. Ask some expert embryologist. I did that very thing myself, just to make sure that my memory hadn't warped with the passage of years. And I was assured not only that I was correct, but that at least a hundred cases in which "caudal appendages" remained after birth are recorded in medical literature.

There, gentlemen, that's where I get that stuff. I could ramble along to the extent of several hundred words more on this subject, but I'm cutting this oration as short as possible. Paper costs money these days, and you can fill in the gaps in this sketch for yourselves.—A. O. FRIEL.

SOMETHING for us about Geronimo and Cochise.

A sergeant of the Fourth Cavalry told me that a scout (White) was sent to demand the surrender of the Indians. Geronimo received him with courtesy, but refused to accept terms at that time. He sent two warriors to escort the scout to the American lines. An instance of savage honor.

Cochise during his career sent a challenge to the cavalry to come out and fight on condition that they left their big knives behind.

The soldiers covered up their sabers and rode to meet the Indians drawn up in line like regulars. On the word to charge their swords flashed in the sun and scared the ponies. The Indians scattered, they feared to face the "big knives." Cochise, who rode a fine horse, covered the retreat and taunted the captain to a duel. Descretion on that occasion was thought to be the better part of valor.

This incident was related to me in 1871 by a cavalryman who was present. This recalls the days when knights were bold. Victorio, Cochise and other chiefs of their time were more formidable enemies that Geronimo.—R. GRAHAM FERGUSSON.

A WORD from W. C. Tuttle concerning his story in this issue:

Spokane, Washington.

I feel that I am fortunate inasmuch as I never have to look up historical data or consult any authority in writing my stuff. I suppose some will say—"It can't be done," when they read some of the Piperock stuff.

I FEEL that it would be possible for some one to sell *Magpie* or *Dirty Shirt* a part of that circus—under those circumstances. I have seen a small river rise from the effects of a cloudburst until it would float a steamboat. I have seen a mad bull travel serenely with more than the weight of three men on its neck and head, and as for *Dirty Shirt* herding that lion, hanging to its tail with one hand while he belabors it with a two by four in the other—who can say it is not possible? Has anybody ever tried it?

Once upon a time, while I was out hunting in Montana, I saw a man get a bear by the tail. It wasn't a real big bear. Seems that it was in an old logging building, and the man happened to go inside. As the bear went past him the man grabbed it. When I saw them they were going some. The bear was yowling and the man was swearing. They traveled about three hundred yards when they came to a tree, which the bear essayed to climb. It got to the lower limbs, but the toggle on it's tail was too much.

I hurried down there, and found the man still hanging on to that stubby tail. Both bear and man had agonized expressions. I asked the man why he didn't let go. He stared at me for a moment, stared at the bear, and then heaved a sigh and let loose.

"I never thought of it," he confessed.

Lucky thing I came along, 'cause he might never have thought of it.—TUT.

DON'T forget our annual vote by readers on the best stories of the year. Be marking down your favorites as you go along. Any one is eligible to vote.

JOINT-SNAKES anyhow, and just possibly hoop-snakes. Speaking strictly from the side-lines, if there are "no such animiles" it is amazing how many credible witnesses are ready to testify to their existence, and if they do exist it's amazing how many credible witnesses can prove they don't. And the horn-snake, too, and the pilot.

Cranford, N. J.

I beg to again take up your time, but as you invite it I am glad of the opportunity to bear witness that there are such things as joint-snakes.

I CAN NOT vouch for hoop-snakes, though my father, whose veracity was never questioned, told me he saw one. In spite of the love I bore him I must say I will have to be shown. One time he told me to put salt on a bird's tail to catch it. I did, with the assistance of a bean-shooter, but the only one I caught was one day I used rock salt and one piece killed the poor little thing. Maybe he was stringing me or had a deeper meaning than I have been able to fathom or he may have seen a hoop-snake. I haven't and, as I said before, I still have to be shown.

As to joint-snakes, in South Carolina they have a small green snake whose scales are very glossy. The color varies with the locality as does the name, being known variously as joint-snake, glass-snake, grass-snake or green-snake.

YOUR correspondent Jas. L. Quimby, Jr. describes the peculiar fact that the joints upon breaking fit into each other. In other words there are four large muscles and when it is disjointed either by a blow or as an act of self-preservation, the parts will quiver and have a slight movement. Mr. Quimby does not carry on with why he separated the pieces but having been raised in S. C. I am familiar enough with the belief of the negro superstition. Our darky believes "yuh tak' a stick and knock 'im an' he breck up in little pieces an' ef yo' don't frow a piece away he come togedder in the night and crawl away." The truth of the matter is, he is not a snake in the true sense of the word but belongs to the lizards and any one knows if you catch a lizard by the tail it will disjoint its tail from its body and run away. Just the same as

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a crab. Catch one by the claw and it will disjoint that claw and run away if you let it. Whether the lizard grows a new tail, as the crab does a claw, I can not say.

I am told that if the skeleton of a glass-snake, which name I know them by best is examined, the fore legs will be seen in a very miniature form. It has ceased to grow them through disuse.

Lastly, they are quite harmless and can easily be made a pet of.—L. J. SCHAEFER.

HIS letter came from Honduras too late for Dr. William C. Robertson to make his bow to us in the First December issue along with his first story (in collaboration with H. Bedford-Jones) in our magazine, but he's talked at Camp-Fire before and will, I hope, talk again.

Now that he's stepped from our general ranks and joined our writers' brigade, he says:

Man alive, it is a fine sensation to be sitting around among that worshipful company. Let us give them a christening. I move, and wait for a seconder, that they be called "The Inky Legion." You see, that is a name which includes all who scribble without reference to grade or assay and will cover all and sundry like a black mantle. Too, it is distinctive and sets them apart from all other legions. Furthermore, it is justified by their looks.

As to the following letter he writes:

I prohibit any meddling with the finale. That has nothing to do with the editorial privilege. It is personal and so must not be touched of thee. Selah!

It's personal all right and I'd surely have cut it out, but there isn't time to argue with a man in Honduras unless this letter too is to be held up instead of running with the story to which it belongs. All of which he probably gleefully figured out.

Doctor Robertson is entitled to a lot of letters after his name but says "I am just plain Billy, at your service and so I wish to remain."

In his letter he brings up again our old question of "What is adventure?" Or, as Edgar Young originally stated it,"What is adventure, biologically considered?"

Galeras, Olancho, Honduras, C. A.

I appreciate the invitation to spread my history before the members of the Camp-Fire, but really can not see that I have anything of interest to tell. Born in Glasgow; educated there; hardened in the "heilands;" I was a rather unsettled "haflin' "—a heavy reader of travel and adventure—and early left the Clyde on my quest of the Grail. Whether I have found it or not, I prefer to leave to the judgment of others. What I certainly did find was—ADVENTURE. It has been my first name all my life, till I have totally lost all perspective, and what at one time thrilled is now the commonplace. I have come to the conclusion that, after all, adventure is a state of mind, and that often the lack of it is the greatest adventure of all. That may take some thought, and even then you may not grasp just what I mean, but I know what I am driving at, and those who have been through as lively times as I will know also.

MY EXPERIENCE has been a little different from that of the many, as I have been in executive positions mostly, and my wanderlust has been for new work or fresh enterprize more than for new places. I admit that when I have learned to master anything I quit it and move along to something else, to which I remain faithful till it in turn is mastered; then repeat. This has been the cause of my knowing many frontiers, as my special love is mechanics, and, in that line, big works where one has to use the means at hand and surmount what appear insuperable difficulties. To install a mining plant out on the feather edge of nothing, using native labor and indifferent tools; or to build a bridge in an inaccessible spot surrounded by hostility, is my idea of a little pleasure; and when the job is done—off to some other frontier to tackle some other more difficult emprise.

This has been my life, for the most part, and to relate it in part or whole would simply be to lay myself open to the charge of being a charter member of the Ananias club. I prefer to make my bow to the lads and lassies at the fire, say "How!" and ask them to let me off for a time, and they may get some of the hectic stuff later.

FOR other matters:—I have a fair education; a good mastery of tools and those who use them; an adequate sprinkling of the arts and sciences; and —well, there's not much more, save that I invariably keep my pledged word.

I belong to the great band who will try anything once, and in its pursuit have rubbed elbows with strange men and manners; have seen odd corners; have drawn the sword under weird banners; held high powers; and have known deep and foul dungeons.

To escape the foulest of all, I came to Honduras in the middle of a dark moon, fleeing the horrors of the dank and loathsome cells of the Morro waiting me for my foolish endeavors to aid the Cubans in their long and dour struggle against the Don. I was a filibuster, despised of the Spaniard and he had the goods on me, so I had to cut my moorings in Biscayne Bay and seek a more salubrious clime. Soon after getting here, war was declared by the States, and I was at liberty to return, having, by that declaration, emerged from the chrysalis of international wrongdoing, to the butterfly blazonry of a hero. The filibuster had become a liberator overnight, but alas for the chance to enjoy the prestige, the poor fish had got himself tangled up in a rainbow looking for a pot of gold, and here he has been ever since in that laudable and unprofitable search. Here, too, the hero is like to remain, unless some galumphus with more money than brains buys his mines and sets him free to browse around the editorial forum to make personal acquaintance with any of you who might wish to know an old Scotch *medico* who has seen a few, and spent a time or two.

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I AM not a novice at the writing game, having been hacking at it more or less since my salad days; but until now I have not broken into the charmed circle of American fiction. But, at long and length, even those defenses have been reduced, and here I am, so please use me decently and maybe I shall tell you of some things ye wot not of. There are such things, don't you know, though most of us are slow to admit it.

One thing I must spread on paper: Since I have been attacking the citadel of the American press, I have met some of the finest and squarest chaps I could wish to know—editors and writers both—and were that alone my reward, I would be more than paid. No criticism, good or bad, meant on their quality as writers or editors, but just on their manly qualities. Their other excellencies you as a body will judge, it being your legitimate function to say whether the editors and writers please you or not. All I maintain is that the said brethren of the inky nose are worth-while men, and not the least of them the sinner who sits near the fire, in the seat of honor.

With a warm hand-grip for all of you, male and female, according to his—or her—kind, I am—W. C. ROBERTSON.

Now for Doctor Robertson's collaborator, H. Bedford-Jones, who also joins our "Inky Legion":

Chicago.

As for myself, I am hardly an adventurer. At the age of ten I tried to commit suicide and the failure discouraged me. I then gave my attention to overthrowing the law in schools and colleges. Then the lure of lake boats, lumber camps, the open road and the north woods drew me. Homely adventures all of them—the most thrilling that of saving the life of a 'jack after knocking him galley-west—humorous some of them, and some humiliating. My adventures have lain in other men's adventure—in a Greek restaurant or among the "dromengroes" who sharpen scissors in the streets—and sometimes stilettoes. Of these I know much—from an old woodsman who is a deserter a dozen times over from every army and navy under heaven to an iron-moulder who has fought with bare knuckles in every Romany camp from Chicago to Japan—but of myself I know little.—H. BEDFORD-JONES.

THE following article, cut from some newspaper whose name did not appear on the clipping, was sent in to us by Id. Card 10526. The article was dated from Madison, Wisconsin.

Daniel Boone's rifle, the genuine old-fashioned flintlock, carried by Boone on many a perilous trip in the dark and bloody hunting grounds of Kentucky and on his famous Indian hunting expeditions, was recently brought into a hardware store in a small town in Southwestern Wisconsin for much needed repairs. It is now the property of Mr. Rafter, Platteville, Wis., formerly of Mississippi, who recently traded his 2,300-acre plantation for Wisconsin property and has moved his effects North. The rifle was given him by a doctor, to whom it had been given by an aged hermit living in the mountains of Tennessee.

The rifle is a formidable affair; a real "long rifle," one of the type that gave the nickname of the "long rifles" to our Western frontiersmen. It has a barrel 46 inches long, is 62 inches over all, a .45-caliber, a flintlock with a patchbox of inlaid silver, and weighs ten pounds. The end of the butt is set with a wild boar's tusk, and has the double or set trigger.

On the side of the stock are carved with a jackknife the words, "Boon's True Fren," on the walnut stock the initials "D. B." and five most significant and sinister notches, each notch standing for "one good Injun." At the lower end of the stock is a long and deeply cut gash said to have been cut by an Indian tomahawk thrown at Boone. What happened to the Indian is not recorded.

THERE is a lot that might be said concerning "In the Maw of the Ice," "The Spine of the Monster," and other "story articles" of that type yet to be done by Theodore S. Solomons, but when I set out to quote from his letters or to attempt to talk about them on my own hook I find the subject can not be satisfactorily handled in sufficiently few words not to wear you out with listening. I believe the type is a new one, but to make plain my reasons, or even to define them definitely to myself, is another matter. So we're merely marking them as "Off-the-Trail" stories and leaving you to your own opinions and judgments.

Anyhow, here is a letter to us by Mr. Solomons back in 1917, written for the specific purpose of making plain his actual experiences in Alaska in reference to handling that territory for "Ask Adventure":

Santa Clara, California.

I have lived in the open practically all of my life. I had about ten years' experience camping, hunting and fishing, traveling and then exploring the then unknown High Sierra of California and Nevada and elsewhere here in the West, before I went to Alaska. During those years I became an authority on the Sierra, and, in some sense, one on general outing life locally. I helped organize the Sierra Club, was a charter member of the American Alpine Club, when it was subsequently formed, became a member and later an honorary or corresponding member (I forget which it is) of the Appalachian Mountain Club, lecturing before them several times—the last time on "Surface Features of Alaska." I was also invited to join the Royal Geographical Society and several European alpine clubs. I had made even then a very close study of equipment and methods of travel in rough country.

I WENT to the Yukon Territory with the first Klondikers in 1897. A little later I became *de facto* Public Administrator of the Territory (we couldn't be officially anything there). I gained a wide familiarity with the country in that job, supplementing my several years of travel and prospecting.

In 1900 I went on down to Nome, studying the country as I went. I was still irregularly a newspaper correspondent, and more personally what

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might be termed a general adventurer and soldier of fortune, minus the recklessness and flavor of unrespectiability attaching to the phrase. I turned my hand to all manner of things, prospecting, mining, business and professional ventures. My old informal connections with the United States Geological Survey and my great interest in geographic work gave a character of exactness and thoroughness to my observations of the country. Like most explorers I always had a strong bent toward definite and correct "fact" data.

Then along about 1905 I began to get into pretty big affairs. I acted for a Syndicate of which I was myself a member, the personnel of which had, in allied ventures, spent a million and a half in developing northwestern Alaska. I had obtained and prospected some coal mines for them—which, by the way, are the greatest deposits of coal known in the world today—and our idea was to generate electric power for large scale mining by long transmission lines. I was a couple of years gathering exact information for them about Alaska in general and that part in particular. The fact that our members—all New Yorkers—represented in the industries of which they stood at the head perhaps a hundred or two hundred million will suggest the thoroughness with which they went at these investigations. I spent some of 1906, 7, 8 and 9 in New York and most of 1910 out here for them, but all the rest of the time I was in Alaska. I have not been there since 1911, but I keep pretty well in touch with it and at the coast here it is very easy to do so with my connections and the general sources of information at one's command.

I COULD give you a great many references either in New York or out here, and will be glad to do so at your request, but for the present probably the following will serve: Your readiest would probably be John O'Hara Cosgrave, who built up *Everybody's*, and who is, or was, when I chinned him last out here, editor of the *Sunday World*. Bailey Millard, former editor of *Cosmopolitan*, etc., etc., and now editor of *Orchard and Farm*, Hearst Building, San Francisco, knows my career from away back, and Wm. Colby, Secretary of the Sierra Club or Professor J. N. Le Conte, University of California, Berkeley (old mountaineering pal of mine) would doubtless vouch for my reliability of statement in any matters geographic—or otherwise, I think. My brother-in-law, Professor M. E. Jaffa, also of the University at Berkeley, would also disown me if he thought me capable of the high crime of inaccuracy, though I should despise myself if the horrible suspicion ever hit me that I am half as accurate as he is. Speaking seriously, I have always been a stickler for accuracy, and have never found it difficult to say "I don't know" in preference to answering any question by guesswork.

TO SUM up, I have a general familiarity with all of Alaska and the Yukon Territory, am not in direct touch with mining and other industrial developments in the latter territory of late years, have a very particular knowledge of the Nome country and northwestern Alaska in general, have a very detailed knowledge of the Sierra Nevada mountains and of scenic California, and a general knowledge of the western end of the continent. By "general knowledge" I do not mean merely the knowledge of a well-informed person who has traveled, but something between that and the expert specialist's knowledge of his specialty—geology, fauna or flora or "cultures," industrial and otherwise. I think though that I have as much knowledge of the *average* of all the various subjects upon which the queries addressed to *Adventure* would touch as any specialist in any one or more of them would be likely to have on such an average of them all. As to the regions as to which I speak of having detailed and particular knowledge, I feel sure that I have better qualifications than the specialist in any one of the subjects related would have of them all.

The main point, though, it seems to me is that in all of this outdoor work it has been my lot to do a great deal of pioneering in regions extremely difficult to penetrate and traverse. In consequence I have had a great deal of experience in testing existing means and methods of travel—boating, packing, back packing, routes and equipments, shifts and expedients, and that sort of thing, In especial I became very expert in high mountain work and in everything pertaining to life and travel in the Far North. In studying many of these problems of outing life in the regions mentioned (note, please, that I have only a reading and hearsay knowledge of southern Alaksa, though I know Southwestern Alaska pretty well) I have gone considerably into the scientific and technical aspects of the problems involved—dietetics as to foods, physics and hygiene as to clothing and other matters, mechanics and physics as to traction and transport, and the like.

Though not actively "adventuring" since I left Alaska, yet I have lived and worked in the mountains here till last Summer, and these problems were for so many years a part of my daily life that I do not think I need regard myself as "rusty."

Information like this about one's self is bound to take on a quality of the egotistic. You of course appreciate the inevitableness of this and will pardon it.—THEO. S. SOLOMONS.

WE'VE had various versions of the incidents of Wild Bill's life, just as we've had various versions of hundreds of other things discussed at Camp-Fire. I hope it's understood by everybody that I'm only the fellow who sort of introduces the speakers and then sits back and listens with the rest of you. It's none of my job to oar in and say "Excuse me, but I think you've got that wrong," or "But Comrade So-and So says just the opposite." Of course any of us is free to say those things at any time to anybody, provided we're decent about it, and I as much as the rest of you, but that's all.

Cleveland, Ohio.

In "Camp-Fire" was a letter written about Wild Bill (Hickok) in which the writer states he was killed in Cheyenne. The gentleman is mistaken. Wild Bill was killed in Deadwood, S. D., on lower Main Street in a saloon and gambling place, by McCloud (my remembrance is that that was the name)for revenge, as Wild Bill had killed McCloud's brother some years previous.

Wild Bill was sitting at a table with others playing poker. McCloud sauntered in, moved behind

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Wild Bill's chair; drew a Colt's Navy and shot a bullet through the back of his head, killing him instantly. McCloud was arrested, tried and acquitted.

Later on two Government officials came to Deadwood and McCloud was again arrested, taken to Yankton, S. D., tried, convicted and hung.

At the time Buffalo Bill (Cody) was stationed at Fort Hays about a mile from the town. He was a Government scout, but all the scouting he did that I could see or learn, was taking Eastern parties out buffalo hunting, one of which later on was Duke Alexis' outfit.—GEORGE L. REDINGTON.

FOLLOWING the Camp-Fire custom, Thomson Burtis rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Stithton, Kentucky.

In responding to the invitation to erupt in a personal manner for the benefit of loungers around the Camp-Fire, I pound my trusty typewriter with all the humility due the kid of the outfit. I reached the advanced age of twenty-four the same week my first acceptance arrived from *Adventure*. I hasten to take the curse off, however, by saying that I left a good home for the hard, cold world at the age of fifteen, with a High School diploma and very little else.

SINCE that time I have attained a reasonable variety of experiences. Jobs I have held, the time varying from a few days to three years. include postal clerk, Y. M. C. A. man, councilor in a boys' camp, tennis coach, hobo, actor, presiding salesman at the mutton-chop counter of a big market, newspaperman, and shavetail in the Army Air Service. Two years of college are mixed in the scramble, and two of the above mentioned occupations enabled me to work my way through those two years.

The newspaper job was a good one. After enlisting as a flying cadet I went to a certain news bureau and offered to work a month for nothing to prove myself good enough to hold a job until called to active service. They consented, and sent me on a trip to army camps in Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Illinois, Michigan and New York. I visited eight camps in those States in thirteen days, wrote half of every night, and landed back in New York with thirty thousand acceptable words to my credit, but one tired hombre. In the next three months I visited all the principal army encampments in the territory bounded by lines drawn between Ayer, Massachusettes; Jacksonville, Florida; Deming, New Mexico; and Rockville, Illinois.

I HAVE had about three years in the Air Service, running the gamut of flying assignments pretty thoroughly; cadet instructor, flight commander, and for eighteen months solid have combined the duties of engineer officer and test pilot. In that time numerous rather perky experiences are bound to come a flyer's way, all consisting of being in the air when something was wrong and it would be much more comfortable on the ground. The dope is to get back on the ground as quickly and comfortably as possible. Sometimes, of course, one gets there too quickly and very uncomfortably. Some false teeth I own testify to that statement.

I have been selling fiction occasionally for three years, mostly to magazines the Camp-Fire gang wouldn't waste a minute in reading. While my *Adventure* story is not my first, however, its acceptance caused me the most pleasure. I am glad to break into this magazine—I have read it for a long time.

I can think of only two unusual things about myself—one of them being my nose, which caused a friend of mine to state, "If you had your nose full of nickels, Burt, you could retire." The other is that I believe I am the only army man in the world who never had his picture taken in uniform. I am unmarried, smoke a pipe incessantly, despise social affairs of all kinds and am the poorest parlor athlete who ever strove to be light on his dancing partner's feet.—THOMSON BURTIS.

And a few words concerning his story in this issue:

I imagine the bugbear—or one bugbear among many—for editors is making sure that more or less technical stories are accurate and true to life. I do not know what the merits of my stories are, but I give you my word that they are "accurate." Donovan Field is Kelly Field—McMullen is McAllen—there is a Department Flight—the trip to McMullen, its conditions and time, etc., are accurate—landing the Le Pere without elevators has been done—except *Jerry Carter*, every character in the story is drawn from actual life, from *Colonel Feldmore* to *Jordan* and *Samansky*. *Dumpy Scarth* had quarters next to me for three months.—THOMSON BURTIS.

AND a word from a later letter bearing on this story:

Godman Field, Camp Knox,
Stithton, Kentucky.

This story is practically a fact-story. I can vouch for all the technical elements of it, having been a flyer for the last three years. Ninety per cent. of the so-called flying stories which appear in the magazines are given the loud haw-haw by flyers because they show a lack of comprehension of the real obstacles, limitations and thrills of flying. The only ones I have seen which are really credible are those of the type splendidly represented by "Wolves of the Air," being well-conceived stories of the flying-machine of the future.

This story is of flying as it is today. Down on the border patrol are flying daily the men who are conceded to be the best flyers in the world today. They are flying through storms such as are described in my story, over mountains, and in a country where the Rio Grande represents the only landing-place.

The fight with the storm in the enclosed story is a more or less common experience. Landing without elevators in a Le Pere was done by a Kelly Field test pilot four months ago—I was the pilot, in fact.

Most people think a loop the acme of flying thrills. Perhaps this story may give a little better idea of the real hazards of the game that kills twelve per cent. of the Army flyers every year, and yet holds a man because of the "kick" there is in it.—THOMSON BURTIS.

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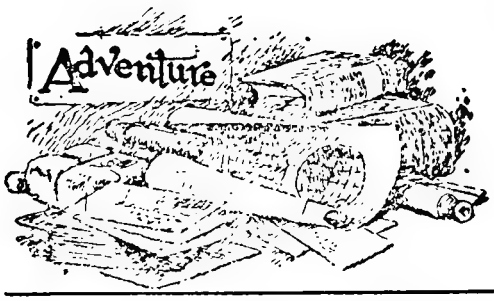

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THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL TRADE: Mid-Dec. 19., 1919 to First Sept., 1920, inclusive, for any issues of 1918.—Address KEARNAN CHATTIN, Albertville, Ala.

WILL SELL: Twenty-four vols. 1919, complete with covers intact for $3.60. Shipment as directed; charges collect.—Address A. C. BOWMAN, 145 Englewood Ave., Detroit, Mich.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1103 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for Ask *Adventure*, but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. Ask *Adventure* covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

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CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

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BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1305 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.: seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

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RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

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6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Early history of Missouri Valley.

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10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
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12. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, 381 Broadway Street, San Francisco, Cal. Covering Lower California and that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce, business and general conditions.

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S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

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15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
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ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, Carmel, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

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21. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

22. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

23. South America Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

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P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

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26. Philippine Islands
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27. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan; commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

28. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing, explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

29. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

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31. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

32. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Building, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

33. Africa Part 5. Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, The Adventurers' Club, 8 South Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois. Climatic conditions, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, mines and minerals, opportunities for employment, direct shipping routes from United States of America, general information covering living conditions, travel and opportunities.

34. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

35. South Sea Islands of French Oceania
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E Street, San Rafael, California. Covering Tahiti and the Society Islands, the Paumotu or Pearl Islands, and the Marquesas. Geography, natives, history, language, customs, travel, equipment, climate, produce, trading, pearl-diving, living conditions and expenses; sports, vanilla and coconut culture.

36. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the Ask *Adventure* editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg, Chicago., Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agrl., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents—in Mr. Mills' case 8 cents— in stamps NOT attached)*

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Canada's Protected Buffalo

THE Yellowstone Park, it seems, does not contain the only large buffalo herd left, as many Americans—myself included—have been wont to think:

Question:—"I would like to know if there are any buffalo southwest of Great Slave Lake; or is that all hot air? Enclosed please find stamped envelope for reply."—ETHAN POSTLE, New Meadows, Idaho.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—The buffalo herd of the north is not a myth. It actually exists and I believe numbers about five hundred. I saw some buffalo in the park at Vancouver, B. C., last month which I was informed came from there.

This herd is ranging between the Great Slave and the Peace River country as near as I can learn. The law has thrown such a mantle of protection over it that it is safer to gun a Siwash than to take a shot at a buffalo; but they are no good for food anyhow.

Many years ago I had a chance to prove this and did so. The flesh is not as well flavored as deer meat and although a man may eat a couple of pounds at a meal he will be hungry again in a few hours. The hide is the best part of them, providing one is not looking for something to eat; but I would rather have young bear or moose any day, so far as food is concerned.

Samuel H. Hanna, Peace River, Alta., may have, or be able to get you, a picture of this bunch. You might drop him a line and ask him as he is a kodak fiend for fair as well as a real good scout.

Drifting Down the Mississippi

OH, TO get away from the hurlyburly of the city, just to sit on the back porch of a houseboat with a ten-cent straw hat on, and your feet hanging over, just floating along—months and months of it. Yea, brother!

Question:—"I would like very much to have some information about a houseboat trip on the Mississippi.

What is the best time of the year to start down the river?

As we live in the far West we thought of starting in Montana somewhere below the Yellowstone Falls, thence down the Missouri to the Mississippi.

Would we encounter falls? Will we be able to obtain a river map at 'most any town over there? Will we be able to buy a second-hand houseboat in that region or would it be better to build one? The men of the party are carpenters.

Is it absolutely necessary to have an engine installed in the boat, or would we be able to steer to the shore with sweeps? They are so ugly and dirty.

We plan to start from San Francisco and motor up the coast to Washington and then across to Montana. We thought we could put the car on the back of the boat.

How far down the Mississippi is it advisable to go, and if we just drifted along with the tide could we possibly make the trip in six months?

Could we buy a milk goat in that part of Montana, or would it be safer to take one from here on the running-board? On account of the children there has to be a reliable source of good milk.

What kind of fishing is there along these rivers—what tackle and line is necessary? Is there any small game to be found? What licenses are necessary?"—MRS. J. W. COREY, San José, Calif.

Answer, by Captain Hanson:—I have myself done a good deal of motor-boating on the Missouri and though I have never done so in Montana, I have several times met men along the river in South Dakota who were going down to the Mississippi, having started far up the Missouri or Yellowstone. The trip is entirely practicable.

If you intend to go all the way to New Orleans, I should say that you should leave your starting-point on the Yellowstone not later than the latter part of June, so as to get advantage of the higher water, for the rivers become low up there in July. One man whom I met had started at Billings, which I think is about as far up as you could start, as it is about 175 miles below the Yellowstone Park.

This man had a most practical houseboat; but it was for himself alone, and you would need a larger one. It was built a good deal like a small pontoon boat, with square ends and flat bottom, but the bottom sloped slightly toward the center, in a flattened V-shape.

He used a sweep with a big paddle at the stern, simply for steering, and when his boat floated upon a shoal sand-bar, which it is bound to do frequently, he simply set his sweep so that the boat kept turning in the current and the V-shaped bottom quickly scooped out the loose sand beneath and set the boat afloat again.

He had a wooden top over the center of the boat, the end being boarded over; and in the center he had his stove, bed, table hinged against the wall, etc. The sides of the superstructure also were of boards; but pieces of canvas were rolled up at the ends to be let down in case of storm, and he had a short mast on the bow on which he hoisted a square sail when the wind was favorable.

Of course this is a slow mode of traveling; you can go only as fast as the current, which averages four miles an hour on the upper Missouri. You could go much faster if you used a gasoline motor, but if you have the time to float several thousand miles, it will not be absolutely necessary.

From St. Louis on down the Mississippi the current is slower—about three miles per hour—altogether you would get about 3,000 miles of four-mile current and 2,000 miles of three-mile current, or approximately forty-nine days of steady drifting. So if you averaged eight hours per day, it would take you five months to reach New Orleans and so on. But I doubt that you could keep up such an average, considering bad weather, stops you would want to make, etc.

If you were going to carry your car on the boat, of course you would have to make a larger boat. You might possibly be able to find a house-boat already built at Billings or near there; but you would probably have to buy the lumber and build it yourselves.

A great many sheep are raised in Montana. You could probably find a milk goat, also. There is good fishing all along the rivers, but no game fish after leaving the Yellowstone. A good deal of small game also, especially ducks and geese in season. For legal hunting State licenses are required in all

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States and the legal seasons must be observed.

As to maps, you had better not depend on finding them locally. You can get excellent maps of the various Northwestern States through which you would pass; also of Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana, at twenty-five cents each from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

A very fine map of the Missouri River in 105 sheets, scale one inch to one mile, was published by the Missouri River Commission years ago, and all of the sheets or any sheets you want can be obtained from the United States Engineer Office, Custom House, Sioux City, Iowa. They are not now accurate as to the exact course of the channel, which shifts every year, but they show in much detail the location of towns, bluffs, tributaries, etc.

If you do not want quite so much detail, you might get just the index maps, of which there are eight, which locate these things with less detail but sufficiently so that you could find your distance from any given point by using the scale.

I neglected to mention that the only obstructions to navigation from Billings down are on the Yellowstone, at the Huntley Irrigation Project, just below Billings, and the Lower Yellowstone Project, just above the junction of the river with the Missouri. There are dams at these places, but channel ways for boats are built around them.

A Ferry Line for Barbados

WITH all due respect to Captain Dingle, I think the question he quotes is a fair one to put to any foreign kicker, whether the foreigner be an American abroad, or the citizen of another country living among us:

Question:—"You will greatly oblige me if you will favor me with any information on a small boat business. Two of us are planning to buy a 24 to 30 foot motor-boat this Fall, and go down to Bridgetown, Barbados, and start a passenger business. We intend to take parties out riding, and also take men to and from their ships.

What I would like to know is:

1. Must a man have any license for such a boat? If so, what kind?

2. Who would you go to, to take out a license or permit to run such a boat?

3. Would the British government let foreigners run such a boat down there?

4. What laws have they, in regards to lights, etc.?

5. What would be the best way to ship such a boat?"—HERBERT KOPPEN, Mankato, Minn.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—I do not think you will require any other license to operate a motor passenger boat in Barbados than the usual custom-house permit, which you can get at the Bridgetown Custom House.

The British government will not bother you. The British Empire is a free empire in the best sense; and the people you compete with will not bother you either, unless you are one of those foreigners who "eat the grub and cuss the cook" wherever you happen to be. In that case you'll probably be told what you Americans are so fond of telling others who criticize things American—

"Why'n'ell don't you go back home, then?"

Light and running laws are about the same as in American harbors. You must carry lights sufficient to indicate to other craft your position and course, and a whistle loud enough to leave others in no doubt what your intentions are. Copies of the local rules will be supplied you at the Custom House, Bridgetown. Your boat can be shipped from New York by steamer or the Quebec S. S. Company, or Lamport & Holt Line, to either of whom write for freight rates.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to Ask *Adventure* editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

How to Build a Log Cabin

AMONG his accomplishments, Mr. Harriman includes that of being a carpenter of parts:

Question:—"Will you kindly tell me how to build a log cabin of two or three rooms; or can you tell me where I can get a plan of one so that I can get an idea of how to construct one? If I build one for myself I know I will have more to do so I would like to know how to do it properly before I start."—OLIVER E. EVANS, Riverside, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—The way I built log cabins in the Minnesota woods was as follows: First I cut two side logs about 22 to 28 feet long, for a two-roomed cabin. Then two 14 feet—all about a foot thick and straight. I notched the side logs, leaving six inches solid outside notches. I notched end logs in same way and rolled them on the side logs, the notches facing. This held logs firmly together.

On this foundation I built walls in the same manner, notching just enough to let the logs come fairly close throughout their length.

For my doors and windows I cut my logs roughly to length, leaving them long enough to recut at each side and putting up braced stakes in pairs to hold the free ends from falling away. Then I made my door and window frames of plank, squared them, nailed on braces to be safe against wracking out of shape.

Placing a frame against the wall and plumbing it with a plumb-bob, I marked down the outer lines, took it away and sawed to the marks. Then I slipped the frame in and drove long spikes through the plank jambs into the log ends.

I sometimes made my walls of logs eight or nine inches thick, on top to the foot-thick foundation logs, leaving the excess thickness inside to receive pole floor-joists—if I planned a wooden floor.

My partition between rooms I sometimes made of straight poles let into notches in wall logs and covered with various substances, such as canvas, grass thatch, also rush thatch, vertical strips of bark or even chinked and mud-daubed. The outer walls I always chinked and daubed with wet clay to stop the wind.

For chinking, cut a straight rift tree and split, after sawing into convenient lengths. The blocks should be three-cornered, about five inches on each

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face, for large logs, smaller according to logs. Drive one edge into crack between logs and fasten with two or three nails. After a cabin is chinked well, daub thick, wet clay all along to close all the cracks left around the chinking. Put it on thick.

I made my rafters out of tamarack poles, as the straightest I could get, put on other tamaracks horizontally and covered with basswood bark, peeled in the Spring. Properly lapped and fastened, this makes a rain-tight roof and a lasting one.

I closed the gables in different ways—with small logs cut to fit between end rafters, with poles and thatch made from rushes or grass, or with bark set vertically and nailed to cross poles.

I built my chimney of stone, with clay mortar, making walls thick. I made my doors of planks or split and adz-hewed puncheons, with oak latch and keeper, operated with a hide latch-string. To lock the door at night one only has to pull the string inside.

My windows were small, with tiny square lights or oblongs 8 x 10 inches.

A comfortable cabin with dirt floor—for Summer use—may be made from trees no more than 6 or 7 inches thickness, with rooms to suit. I had some fairly comfortable hours in Winter in one such where the rooms were duplicates—8 x 10 feet—walls 7 feet high—one door—one window—to each room. Another—of 6-inch poles—had thatched walls and roof-rushes from the lake furnishing the outer skin—and it was warm.

Trading on North Siberian Coast

MAYBE by the time this reaches your eyes the mystery may be disclosed of the deal said to be made by Washington D. Vanderlip with the Bolsheviki. And maybe that alleged deal, or some such, has changed conditions. But as this is written, here is how things are in the trading game on the Russian side of the Bering:

Question:—"I see that you cover Russia and vicinity, so I would like a little information on the trading conditions there.

The conditions of the fur and fish trading in Russia and Siberia and the islands around the Bering Strait.

The customs and habits of the natives.

What condition are the fur and fish in when traded?

Where are the good hunting-grounds to be found?

What would be the earliest possible time to go into Siberia to get this stuff?"— —— ——, Philadelphia, Penn.

Answer, by Mr. Beriah Brown:—The fur trade with natives along the coast of northern Siberia is in the hands of two or three small companies operating schooners equipped with auxiliary power. These vessels usually leave Seattle in July and arrive in the north about the time the ice goes out of Bering Sea and the straits.

The natives with whom they deal are much the same type and have much the same customs as the Eskimos, although there is marked variance in type along different parts of the coast.

Any one entering this trade would of course have to be prepared to meet the competition of well-financed companies already controlling the greater share of the trade and who know the natives well, having traded with them for years. But according to popular belief there is good money in the trade.

A Business Career in Japan

EVERYBODY is predicting great things for hustlers in the Orient. But—a word to the wise—get your job over there cinched over here before you leave the land of green corn and trap-plumbing:

Question:—"I have an offer to go to Japan as a representative in the paper line. How much would it cost me to live there? Would one have to live at a hotel, or are there American boarding-houses there? Is the Y. M. C. A. or any other like American organization located in the principal cities? If so could one live at them?

Is there an American colony where one could live with his wife and child? If so would I rent a house and furnish it, or would I have to live at a hotel or boarding-house? Which would be the more economical? What would be the cost of maintaining a family of three in that country?

What is the climate and what is the fare from New York? How long does it take to go there? Would you advise me to take my family there? What is feeling toward Americans? What do you think of the country as a field for a young man?" — —— ——, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Grace P. T. Knudson:—With reference to living in Japan: It has been my personal experience that living there costs comparatively the same as in a large city in this country; that is to say, living as I judge a man like yourself would naturally and reasonably want to live—in good medium-class style. That would place you in good standing in any community there.

In your place, to be safe, I should estimate expenses by adding about ten per cent. to your expenses at present in Brooklyn. After you learn the country and native resources you may be able to live cheaper than here.

There are good American boarding-houses in all the large cities. Yokohoma, Tokyo, Kobe, and other commercial coast cities have American and English residential districts where one may board or rent small houses and live well. The latter would be more satisfactory and more economical after you are acquainted with conditions there. The Bluff in Yokohoma is such a district. Get your Y. M. C. A. in Brooklyn to inform you of the Association work in Japan.

The climate is similar to our own, with somewhat colder seasons in the northern islands and verging on semi-tropical in the southern part of the empire—say south of Kobe.

Across the continent and by the North Pacific route it is possible for you to make Japan in eighteen days. Write the Canadian Pacific Ocean Services, Ltd., New York City, or to Nippon Yusen Kaisha, 120 Broadway, New York, for rates and information regarding sailings.

Across the continent and by a South Pacific route it will take nearly a month. Write for rates

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and sailings to Pacific Mail Steamship Company, 104 Pearl St., New York. It is possible to go by water from New York and the time is several weeks longer. It would be well for you to inquire as to rates from American Express Company, Travel Department, 65 Broadway, or of Thos. Cook & Son in New York for rates and sailings.

If you have the means to do so you can safely take your family. The feeling toward Americans has been very friendly among the general classes of Japanese. There is a political class ready to criticize us unfavorably, and our government attitude toward recent Japanese questions may have aroused some feeling against us in some circles, but probably nothing serious as the Japanese really want our friendship.

Were I a young man I should consider myself very fortunate to have an opportunity to go to Japan in a business capacity. The Orient in general is a splendid field for any level-headed and ambitious person, and once in Japan you are near enough to other parts of the Orient to know what openings come up.

You will naturally land in Yokohama, and I advise you to go to the Pleasanton Hotel for a few days until you can get your bearings, unless for business reasons you should want to keep with "the crowd." It is a quiet, moderate-priced family hotel patronized by a fine class of people. The other two large hotels are better known by tourists and more talked about, also more expensive in their charges.

Where the U. S. Gold Dollar Is Always on a Discount

URUGUAY:

Question:—"Please give me all the information possible regarding the State of Uruguay, South America. Are there big opportunities for a man with a small capital of about $10,000? Is land cheap? Can one buy cattle and resell at a good profit? Please advise what you think would be the best investment for a young man with a small family.

Inclosed please find stamped envelope."—F. B. REDUS, Harrison, Ark.

Answer, by Dr. Goldsmith:—The republic of Uruguay, although the smallest of the South American countries, is one of the most advanced, in every sense of the word. It has admirable laws, fine people, a good government, excellent institutions, good and widely distributed schools, and it is very prosperous.

It is the only country in the world where the United States dollar has always been on a discount —about one per cent.—due to the fact that the Uruguayan standard has more gold in it than that of the United States, and not to our lack of credit.

Great fortunes have been made there in agriculture and cattle-raising. However, I think it is not the best country for the incomer with a modest sum to invest, due to the fact that the country is so highly developed. The price of land in the neighborhood of the railways and centers of population is high.

If I might offer the suggestion, I think you would probably do better in Paraguay, which is a much more productive country and also one in which the government is offering special inducements to the right kind of incomer. Several large North American refrigerating plants have been established in or near Asunción, and renewed attention is now being given to the development of the cattle business.

If I myself were going to invest $10,000 in a cattle ranch I should select Paraguay, but remember that in this case, as in all other cases, I think one should go with his investment and invest it himself, in order to get good results.

Wants to Prospect Hawaii

IT CAN'T be done:

Question:—"Please send me any information you can of the Hawaiian Islands. I am planning a prospecting trip."—B. S. MATHEWS, Wichita Falls, Texas.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—In the literature sent you under separate cover you will note there are absolutely no minerals of any kind to be found on the islands; that the principal industry is agricultural and allied industries.

Four Tips on Guns

IT'S a relief, Ask *Adventure* experts tell us, to do business with inquirers who know what they want to know. For example:

Question:—"If a rifle whose point-blank range is 300 yards is sighted on a target at 600 yards does the bullet ever reach a higher altitude than the true line of the bore?

Two rifles are of different caliber but have the same muzzle velocity. Which will shoot the farther?

What is the difference in the shocking power of a .30 U. S. and a .250-3,000 high power at 300 yards? At 1,000?

Compare a .30 U. S. and a .250-3,000. Which is the better all-round gun?"—W. R. LIMON, Montesano, Wash.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—No, the bullet never rises above the true line of the bore, or line of departure. It rises above the line of sight, however.

The bullet weighing the heavier will carry the farther, muzzle velocities being equal.

The energy of the two at 300 yards is: .30 U. S. Army, 985; .250-3,000, 783; at 1,000 yards, .30 U. S. Army, 337; .250-3,000, 165. All the above in foot pounds energy.

Both guns are very good for different purposes. I would rather have the .250 for long shots, or animals smaller than bear; for larger or more dangerous animals, the .30 U. S. Army would be the gun. Both will kill any American game if the bullet is placed right.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to Ask Adventure editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

WHITE, EMORY. About six feet tall, weighs 200 pounds, complexion light, brown curly hair, gray eyes, present age forty-eight. Last seen or heard from at Silver City, New Mexico, October, 1910. Started for Bakersfield, Cal. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write his daughter.—Address LILIAN WHITE BARNES, Box 279, Cristobal, Canal Zone.

VAN ZILE, RALPH. Brother. Last heard of in Ashland, Wis., about four years ago. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address E. D. VAN ZILE, 424 So. Central Ave., Marshfield, Wis.

DE CISARE, MISS FLORENCE. Nineteen years old, five feet, six inches tall, dark brown hair, dark brown eyes, 140 pounds, Italian birth. Left Bridgeport, July, 1920, with Mrs. Rosie Annunciata, forty-five years old, five feet, three inches tall, black hair, black eyes. Formerly in wholesale fruit business. Any information as to their whereabouts please communicate to W. E. B., Washington and Madison Aves., Bridgeport, Conn.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BROTHER. Would like to know your whereabouts. Write home immediately so as to relieve our anxiety. Your sister, B. H. W.

SWENSON, N. A. Am back in New York. Write. Why didn't you write me care of Calaveras?—Address W. D. M. T., 147 West 44th St., New York, N. Y.

SOLAN, JOE. Formerly of 1st. F. A. Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Hawaii. Discharged in 1918 in California. Let your old pal know where you are. Write to SAM R. care of Morris Krishner, 60 Amboy St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

SMITH, WILLIAM J. Brother. Age about twenty-nine years. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write—MRS. E. BAKER, 159 Central Ave., San Francisco, Cal.

BENTLEY, MILTON REYNOLDS. Uncle. Age about fifty-eight, short stature, dark complexion, dark hair. A painter and wood-worker by trade. Son of Hiram Bentley of Ravenna, Ohio. Last heard of in Akron, Ohio. Uncle Mit if you see this write me at once as I have good news for you.—Address LOWELL H. MEACHAM, 1310 Michigan St., Toledo, Ohio.

MYERS, WILLIAM X. Born in Virginia. Has scar under one eye and on chin. May be practising law or may be a traveling salesman. Have information he will appreciate. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write—L. T., 411, care of *Adventure.*

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

TOURS, 2ND A. I. C. FRANCE. Would like to hear from any of the boys in photo sections located here after the Armistice. Bart, Alabam, MacNamara, Brooks White, Sullivan, Capt. Place, and all the rest write "Big Slim" of the Seventh. Also members of the 5th Casuals at St. Louis de Montferrand.—Address L. T., 412, care of *Adventure.*

RACINE, JON. Son. Please let me hear from you, no matter what has happened.—Address MOMS.

PAGE, W. A. Am back in New York. Write. W. D. M. T., 147 West 44th St., New York, N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WILSON, G. HARRY. Lived in Yorkville, 1896-1900. Left New York for the Klondike in 1900. If you wish to know the whereabouts of your son and daughter communicate with T. H. WILSON, 1070 Washington Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

STEEN, WILLIAM F. Six feet, one inch tall, weighs about 145 pounds, boyish, oval face, gray-blue eyes. Left home on red Pathfinder bicycle. You are needed by heart-broken mother. You need not go to school if you prefer work, but let us know where you are. After Nov. 1st, go or write to your Uncle Frank. Will appreciate any information as to his whereabouts.—Address MRS. A. STEEN, 4309 N. Kedvale Ave., Chicago, Ill.

MARTIN, EUGENE L. (Gene) Last heard of in Akron, Ohio, in 1911. Worked in belt department of B. F. Goodrich Co. Also worked on Great Lake steamers. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. ROSE B. MARTIN, 4033—15 St. N. E., Seattle, Wash.

VOSBURGH, EDWARD. Last heard of in November, 1919, somewhere in New Jersey. Left Rutland, Vermont, August 13, 1919, where he worked on the railroad. He is now nineteen years of age. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. ERNEST E. BROWN, 6 Day St., New Britain, Conn.

KUHN, HERMAN. Age about thirty-four, dark complexion. Served in the U. S. Navy on the gunboat U. S. S. *Helena* at the China station. He enlisted at Shanghai, China, and served between 1913 and 1917. Have important news for him. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address SNOOKUMS—RUSSEL BAUMAN, 351 Walnut St., Pottstown, Pa.

SIEVERT, OTTO CHARLES. "DIFFIE." Last heard from about February 27th, 1896. Said he was going to St. Louis. Worked as fireman on the steamships *C. H. King* and the *Fayette* in 1895. From 1891 to 1895 he was heard from at most of the ports at the Great Lakes—from Chicago to Buffalo.—Address H. W. SIEVERT, 309 River St., Chicago, Ill.

MACMAHON, HAROLD. Seventeen years of age, hazel eyes, five feet eight inches tall, brown hair, pompadour. Left Santa Barbara with Alfred Holt on the afternoon of April 23rd, 1920. Harold, my dear son, come home. All is forgiven and to save your mother a broken heart, waste no time in coming or at least let me hear from you. Your loving father.

$250.00 reward will be given for any information concerning his whereabouts.—Address (Mother) MRS. IDA MACMAHON, 4210 Holden St., Emeryville, Cal.

INGELS, DR. ANSON B. Connected with hospital department of Copper Queen Mining Company, Bisbee, Arizona, in the early part of 1914. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address JAY E. BURNS, 5514 W. Lake St., Chicago, Ill.

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WOOD, ELMER. Last heard of in New York in April. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address GEORGE WOOD, care of *Adventure*.

O'CONNOR, JEREMIAH. Native of Killarney, County Kerry, Ireland. Has been in United States about forty-eight years. Last heard from in Denver, Colorado, twenty-eight years ago. Has also been in Panama and Little Rock, Ark. His sister would like to hear from him.—Address MISS MARY O'CONNOR, 2825 West 32nd Ave., Denver, Colo.

HICKEY, FRANK. Nephew. Left home about four years ago. Age then eighteen. Tall and slim, black hair and blue-gray eyes. Has scar on one side of nose and lip. Born in Denver, Colo., May, 1898. His disappearance has broken his mother's heart. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—MRS. KATHRYN LITTLE, 620 Sacramento St., Vallejo, Cal.

C. L. W. Husband. Come home at once. I am in great trouble. Must see you; everything O. K.—MARY.

THE following have been inquired for in either the Mid-January or First February issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirer from this magazine:

ASTOR, MISS MATTIE; Bassett, Frank A.; Blackburn, George W.; Carpenter, Elmer; Cheney, E. H.; Cheney, S. H.; Cunningham, Juliet; Diven, David Ward; Farrell, Joseph P.; Fredericks, Erick; Gray, Gene; Greely, Pearl Adam; Hammons, Albert; Hayes, John M.; Herbert, Sidney; Hestvan, Casterea; (Harry Clark) Jones, Frank; Jones, Homer; Kench, Frank; Keyes, Fayette E.; Kuhn, Herman; Lanahan, Bob; Lewis, Evelyn A.; Lovers, Jimmy, and Cooper H. Leslie; Luca, Dimaggio; MacMahon, Harold; Martin, Eugene L.; Miller, Harry; Pemiman, Jane; Reed, Forrest B.; Rupert, Joseph; Sievert, Otto Charles; Sims, Wayne J.; Stalker, James; Story, Capt. Sydney S.; Tribble, Ralph; Vosburgh, Edward; Walker, Sailor Fred; Webster, E. M.; Wood, Elmer; Wheat, Mrs. Lula.

MISCELLANEOUS: A. E. S.; Descendant of Ezekiel Hopkins; Former members of 269th Aero Squadron; Montague, Lena; Dennison, Mabel; Stiles, Elizabeth, and other friends; Tibbets, Martelle A.; Hodgson, Joseph, or any one who remembers Pvt. Percy Laidlaw, 1st Royal Quebec Regt.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieutenant Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Bennett; Byron Chisholm; A. B. Paradis; E. E. S. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; J. Higmon; J. E. Warner; L. E. Patten; L. T. Bennett; Sinn Cardie; James Mosse; C. E. Wilson; R. W. Kimsey; C. H. Huntington; D. Polowe.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity:

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Allen, Paul; Beaton, G. M.; Mr. and Mrs. Bennett; Bertsch, Miss Elizabeth; Blighton, Frank; Bonner, J. S.; Bromell, Mr.; Buckley, Ray; Campbell, Maurice Viele; Carpenter, Robert S.; Carr, John; Chisholm, D. F. K.; Clark, Ernest S.; Cleve, Jim; Clingham, Charles; Coles, Bobby; Connor, A. M.; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Corbett, Fred P.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Curtis, D. A.; Courtlandt, Victor; Fairfax, Boyd; Fisher, 1st Sgt. R.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hoffman, J. M.; Howard, Charlie; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Irving, Thos. L.; Jackson, Robert R.; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lanahan, Robert; Lancaster, C. E.; Lauder, Harry; Larisey, Jack; Lee, Capt. Harry; Lee, Wm. R., M.D.; Lonely Jock; Lovett, Harold S.; MacDonald, Tony; Mackintosh, D. T. A.; Mendelson, Aleck; Nelson, Frank Lovell; O'Hara, Jack; Olmstead, Harry E.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phipps, Corbett C.; Pigeon, A. H.; Raines, Wm. L.; Raphaelson, Sampson; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Rogan, Chas. B.; Rundle, Merrill G.; St. Claire, Fred; Schmidt, G.; Scott, James F.; Sloan, George L.; Smith, C. O.; Starr, Ted.; Soloway, Jack M.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Wiley, Floyd; J. C. H.; W W T.; S. 177284; L. T. 4430; WS-XV.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you. Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FIRST MARCH ISSUE

Besides the two stories mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next number will contain:

THE HEART OF THE RANGE A Five-Part Story Conclusion — *William Patterson White*
Racey assists the Law with dynamite.

THE MAN-EATER — *J. P. Leland*
A cockpit warrior fights for charity.

LIGHTS OF PEACE — *Kenneth Gilbert*
How an Eskimo prevented another war.

THE PATH OF A KING Each story complete in itself — *John Buchan*
III The Wife of Flanders
A woman who should have been a man.
IV The Eyes of Youth
Crusader and Tatar meet.

THE DREAM'S END — *Chester L. Saxby*
Arnie gets a berth and a bottle.

THE BURDEN PATERNAL — *Captain Dingle*
Of a sea-captain who hit another ship—and why.

IVORY — *L. Patrick Greene*
The Major finds the elephants' burial-place.

CLOTHES AND THE MAN — *G. A. Wells*
A Western sheriff goes after a bad-man.

THE RIDER ON THE LOG — *Roger Daniels*
The lumberjacks battle for leadership.

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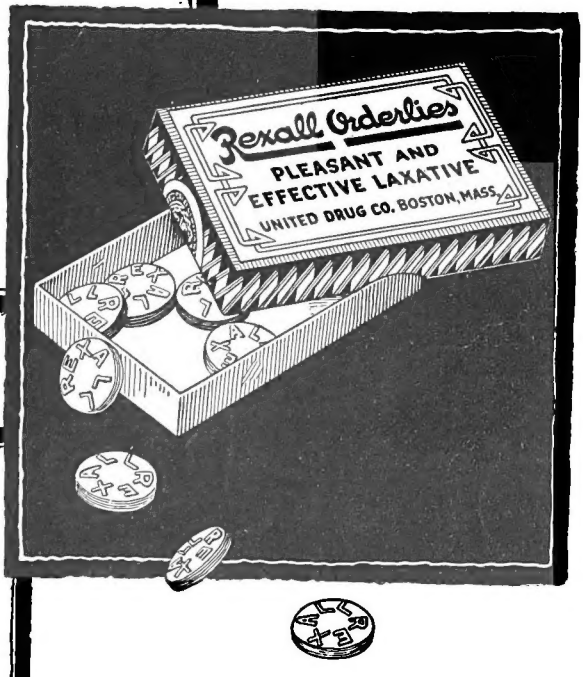

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